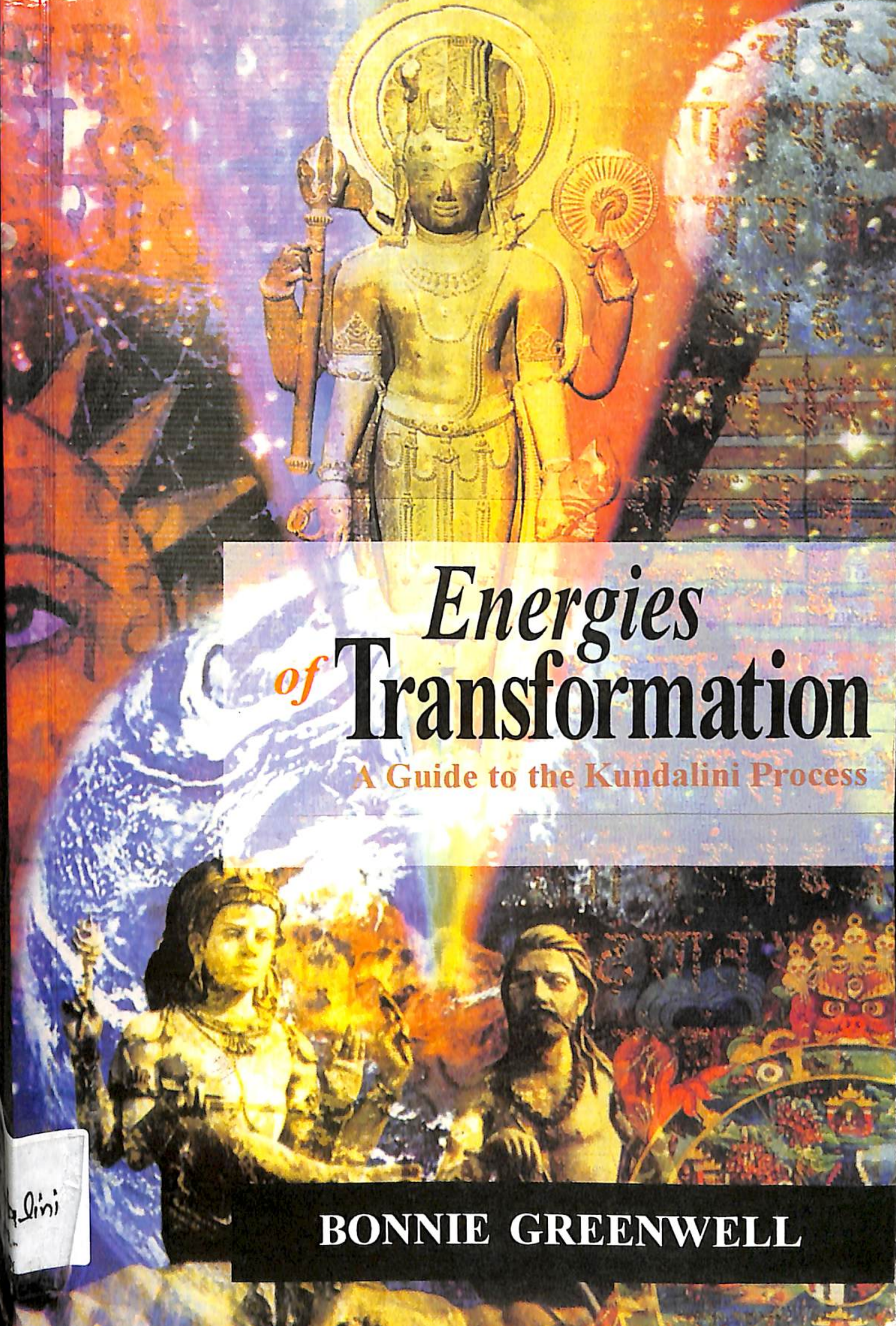

Energies of Transformation

A Guide to the Kundalini Process

BONNIE GREENWELL

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DEDICATION

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
MY PARENTS
PERRY ROSWELL YATES AND GERTRUDE RYAN YATES
TO MY HUSBAND, BILL
AND TO MY CHILDREN
TONY, JEFF AND KRISTIN
AND WITH SPECIAL GRATITUDE
TO THE SUBJECTS
WHO GENEROUSLY AND COURAGEOUSLY SHARED THEIR
STORIES IN ORDER THAT OTHERS WHO ENGAGE THIS
EXPERIENCE CAN DISCOVER MORE READILY HOW TO USE IT
FOR TRANSFORMATION

ENERGIES OF TRANSFORMATION: A GUIDE TO THE KUNDALINI PROCESS

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Preface

Perhaps you have wondered about unusual experiences you may have had while meditating, or you have encountered an inexplicable energy that has disrupted and changed your life in dramatic ways. Or you may be a physician, psychotherapist or healer looking for an explanation for symptoms you are unable to categorize adequately using the norms of western medicine. If so, this book is written to help you recognize and support a unique, universal and ageless process related to spiritual experience and psychological wholeness and identified in ancient times as Kundalini awakening.

While I was working on my Ph.D. in Transpersonal Psychology I discovered the profound interface between physical and spiritual energies, and their impact on psychological structures. Plummeted into ecstatic energy, chaotic movements and major shifts in awareness through my own personal process, a combination of neo-Reichian body therapy and intense meditation, I began a search for information about what was happening to me. A friend introduced me to yoga, and in the translations of ancient scriptures and the teachings of the yogis, I discovered descriptions of my radical new experiences. The need to find deeper understanding of the phenomenon led me to enroll in advanced training to become a teacher of Ashtanga Yoga and I was graciously allowed to study the unpublished manuscripts of the jnana yoga teacher Baba Hari Dass, an expert on Yoga Sutras, tantric practices and scriptures.

When exploring this subject among friends and at seminars I discovered that many people today are facing the chaos and change of Kundalini awakening due to spiritual practices, modern therapies which deal with the body and non-ordinary states of consciousness, following drug use or near-death experiences, or even spontaneously for no recognizable reason. Psychologists, physicians and even spiritual teachers often misinterpret their symptoms with grave consequences to them. I decided to gather together as much information from as many sources as possible about how to support and nurture this process to its ideal fruition, which according to eastern scriptures is a changed perspective of the nature of existence, expanded consciousness and bliss.

I've explored over 200 manuscripts to gather the bits and pieces that each had to offer about this ancient and esoteric experience, which must be imbedded very deeply in the psyche to have been recorded since the very beginning of records. I've interviewed dozens of Westerners who have described this process and how it impacted their lives, and ten of these cases are described in depth in this manuscript.

I am extremely grateful to the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology for supporting my decision to use this material to write a dissertation on such a nontraditional topic, and to my committee members, Dr. Jill Mellick, Dr. Robert Frager and Dr. Ron Jones, who understand implicitly the connections between spirituality and psychology, and model it in their lives. Portions of this volume were first published in the dissertation: Kundalini: A Study of Eastern and Western Perspectives and Experiences and Their Implications for Transpersonal Psychotherapists (Jan. 1988). I wish also to acknowledge the contributions of additional mentors and friends including my husband, Bill, Dr. Gay Hendricks, Dr. Judith Cornell, Dr. Jim Spencer, Dr. Jonathan Hart, Baba Hari Dass, Janardin and the yogis at Mt. Madonna Center, in Watsonville, CA., all of whom made it possible for me to do this work.

The title for this book emerged during a committee meeting for the planning of a conference about Kundalini, called Energies of Transformation, held by the Spiritual Emergence Network in March of 1990. I am grateful to whomever came up with it but none of us remember who said it first! Energies of transformation have been described under various names in the esoteric practices of every culture and the phrase reflects the universality. of this process and the multiplicity of its impact.

Many Sanscrit terms are used in this manuscript but for the ease of western readers phonetic marks and italics are omitted as much as possible. Definitions are usually provided when Sanscrit words are first used, as well as in the glossary. Unfortunately, the English language offers a poor translation for Sanscrit, which has an expansive vocabulary related to spiritual philosophy and phenomena, with many fine nuances that are lacking in English.

The term "Kundalini" is capitalized because this energy/consciousness has been personified as a Goddess in the scriptures, and I've found it sustains my spiritual and creative process to interact with Her as such. I have also used numerous references, a practice not always comfortable for the reader, but essential to the work, for this book is standing on the shoulders of hundreds who have written before about this subject, ranging from small treasures of obscure scriptural translations, to encyclopedic volumes such as those of Sri Aurobindo. Hopefully it will entice you to read more eastern literature, especially if you are in a Kundalini process, as it is nurturing for the soul. Also, I hope to demonstrate by including such a vast number of scholars and teachers that this is not an abnormal or deranged process simply because it is unknown to the average practitioner of western medicine, but has been described by some of the most remarkably talented and intelligent people of every age. There is ample cross-cultural validation for Kundalini awakening, and a wide range of scriptures that define and support the profound impact and spiritual deepening this experience can bring to people's lives.

If you have fallen into the maelstrom of this process, either with intention or inadvertently, I hope the context and guidelines offered here will serve you well.

CHAPTER ONE

KUNDALINI: AWAKENING TO RADICAL SPIRITUALITY

> Suddenly energy moved up from the bottom of my spine to my heart and exploded like a neutron bomb going off in my chest. I expanded spherically in tiny pieces, which were all that remained of me, like bits of energy traveling fast through warp speed to the ends of the universe...I became waves of energy passing on and on past the edges of the universe. Nothing was left... Rob.

This book is about the subtle energy of the life force, the pure consciousness beyond mind and the ecstatic experience of spiritual awakening. It also tells of physical collapse, psychic chaos, and personality upheaval, those elements of human transformation that uproot individuals to the core. It tells the stories of people, both ancient and modern, who have discovered and integrated an experience that pushes the edges of their sanity and their divinity. And it is a guide for survival and transformation.

It appears that when people pray, meditate, or turn inward with great intensity to find "God", what they may ultimately experience is the *sat-chit-ananda* of the ancient Indian scriptures. *Sat* is existence or beingness, the substance or essence that is all things. Eastern scriptures state that prior to creation there was only *sat,* one without a second, undivided. It exists always and everywhere. *Chit* is cosmic intelligence or knowledge that fills everything, a consciousness without personal identity. *Ananda* is ecstatic bliss. Indian pandits identify these three qualities as the essential nature of existence. Direct intuition of them becomes possible following the eruption of Kundalini energy, which is latent in each of us. When this primal, intense energy awakens it seems to move with intentionality through the body and psyche and is believed by eastern mystics to have the power to transform a person at the cellular level. When one feels the first intense waves of this energy/consciousness, and is tossed into the physical, psychological and spiritual chaos that follows, it is called Kundalini awakening.

If you have awakened this energy, whether through discipline and spiritual practice, as a consequence of breathwork or other intense therapies, following a near-death experience or other traumatic event, or inexplicably, for no reason at all that you can understand, you are connecting with evolutionary energetic and psychic forces. These energies carry consciousness with them, just as waves in the air can carry radio signals, and in some people cause the equivalent of a psychic Armageddon, where the boundaries that have contained self-identity are pushed open and new possibilities emerge.

People who have experienced the sudden awakening of Kundalini energy describe it in many ways. Here are two examples:

> While meditating I felt suddenly as if I had broken through a layer of ice and could feel myself dancing above an ocean of bliss, feeling my toes touching it, feeling intense thrills, warm, flowing from my toes up through my body, flowing everywhere. Then I was plunged into this ocean and lost awareness of what was happening. It was indescribable..Jay

> I reached for a book of Yogananda's, to look up a quote. I felt as if someone put a heavy hand on my shoulder and pressed me down to the floor and stretched me out. Waves of ecstatic energy flooded through me and my mind was lost in energy and light. I stayed like this for about four hours...Chris.

While these experiences are remarkable as singular events in someone's life, they are identifiable as Kundalini experiences because they are the initial events triggering other processes lasting months and years. There are many phenomena that accompany this awakening of spiritual energy/consciousness. They fall into roughly seven categories: kriyas (involuntary movements); body sensations and symptoms; spontaneous yogic postures and breathing; emotional upheavals; extrasensory input -- visual, auditory and olfactory; psychic and paranormal phenomena; and samadhi or satori experiences. Major changes in perspective and lifestyle frequently accompany such an awakening.

Often the first flush of Kundalini is felt as energy moving up from the base of the spine where, according to esoteric literature, it has been coiled into a latent form since birth. It may flood the body like a geyser, crawl slowly upward in a spiral motion like a snake, or flow in a steady stream up the spine and through the crown of the head. The body vibrates or feels charged by energetic and (if fortunate) ecstatic sensations. The nervous system may be overwhelmed by intense heat, sounds, or light. The energy may then seem to fade away. Or it may linger and remake the man or woman, from the ground up as it were, into a new person. This new person may struggle for years with physical and psychological upheavals. It feels as if every latent or incomplete physical and emotional condition in the body/mind system must be addressed and resolved.

This "radical" spiritual experience seems to arise from the deepest roots of the Self, and sweeps one into revolutionary personality and physiological changes. The intensity of this movement has been described in some yogic scriptures as the rush of a divine goddess, Shakti, who is released and charging upward through the system to be reunited with her lover, Siva, the universal consciousness that awaits her. This demanding goddess, the creatrix and sustainer of the human being, initiates a struggle to free human consciousness from worldly thoughts, and she produces a wide range of psychic and physiological phenomena, promotes ecstatic experience and agonizing self-confrontation, and demands the reorientation of one's life.

After centuries of hiding in nearly every culture on the globe as a secret esoteric truth, the Kundalini experience is reported more and more frequently among modern spiritual seekers and appears to be occurring even among people who do not follow spiritual practices. When this happens to people who have neither context nor understanding of the correlates between physical and mystical experiences, it can leave them bewildered and fearful, even psychologically fragmented. And when they turn to traditional physicians, psychotherapists or church advisors their anxiety is compounded because western culture offers them no framework with which to integrate the connection between spirituality and physical energy in the body.

Spiritual awakening need not be a fragmenting nor painful event, although it clearly triggers both physical and emotional transformation. There is ample evidence that the nature of spiritual energy is primarily expanded consciousness and bliss, which is felt consistently once the process has stabilized. It is helpful to view this as a process: a series of actions, changes and functions intended to strengthen the body and character in order to build a vehicle strong enough to hold spiritual energy and insight. Yogis believe a great deal of structure must be created in the body/mind complex through yoga practices, self-discipline and moderate living before it is safe to awaken Kundalini. Many westerners, who have awakened it with little preparation, find themselves navigating the challenges of this transformation with inadequate personal resources to contain it.

Kundalini Awakening in the West

In recent years the awakening of Kundalini energy is occurring more commonly or is reported more often by individuals in western society who experience it either spontaneously or as a result of certain spiritual practices or therapeutic processes. Many factors may be influencing this eruption of spiritual consciousness, including the fact that wide-spread meditation and energy-raising practices have been available in the West since their introduction in the 1930's by yogis such as Paramahansa Yogananda (Kriya Yoga) and Swami Vivekananda. Since then many others have brought yogic, tantric, Buddhist, Zen and Sufi practices from India, Tibet, China, Japan and Islamic countries.

Classical scriptures indicate that these kinds of practices prepare the mind and body to experience and integrate an altered state of consciousness that will transform the spiritual, physical and emotional life. All sincere meditation processes promote such transpersonal states of consciousness, even those associated with schools that do not describe nor encourage experiences with Kundalini energy. Although some people who meditate have a conscious intention of awakening Kundalini, evidence of the energy is inexplicable to others because Kundalini is not recognized within the spiritual traditions they follow.

In addition to the thousands of people practicing meditation or yogic breathing exercises (called pranayama) with little understanding of the depths to which the practices may lead them, many people are exploring new forms of therapy and bodywork that utilize the breath in ways similar to ancient yogic techniques for awakening Kundalini. Others have experienced altered states while under the influence of drugs such as LSD and ADMA, which can open consciousness into radical spiritual emergence. Drug experiences are generally not considered by spiritual teachers to be valid as mystical experiences but they have opened many minds to the range of potential lying dormant in the psyche, and a number of authors have credited such insights with leading them into a search for a spiritual perspective, seeking safer ways to expand and stabilize these kinds of experiences.

Not only spiritual teachers but psychotherapists, psychics, body therapists and other kinds of educators have promoted meditation practices, varieties of Tantric practices, training for out-of-body experiences, breathing processes such as Rebirthing, Holotropic Therapy, and Radiance Breathwork, and Reichian and neo-Reichian bodywork. Hatha yoga exercises, Tai Chi and Aikido classes are available in most communities. All of these practices tend to activate and amplify certain kinds of energies previously latent or less active in the physical system. Deep relaxation processes, biofeedback, imagery and gentler styles of bodywork can also deeply affect the subtle body energy system, in which Kundalini is a major factor.Some therapists and sociologists have researched near-death experiences and reported radical shifts in energy and consciousness that often accompany them. Other researchers report people who seem to become spiritually awakened through dreams. A 1988 Harris poll indicated that close to 4.5 million Americans meditate. It is probable that most of these people have been exposed to at least a nominal number of processes that can awaken the spiritual Self, the energy of Kundalini.

Perhaps the awakening of Kundalini in the West is also a psychic response occurring in greater numbers at this juncture in history because of the growing disillusion and fear regarding traditional models of power and success in western society...fear of death, of nuclear or natural disasters, of alienation, of deprivation. Spiritual consciousness and hope is a natural balancing element for such dark musings. Awareness of pain and suffering in the world motivated the Buddha's search, and such awareness is more and more difficult to repress and avoid.

All of these factors -- exposure to many practices, especially meditation, and deep concern about the meaning of life -- are found in the histories of people who report Kundalini symptoms. Yet one can never predict who will awaken this energy. Openness of mind, heart and/or body seems to promote it. This means it is helpful if psychological and emotional conflicts are minimal and the body is free of blocks and tensions. It is well to have few attachments regarding worldly concerns.

Passionate love for a divine Being or spiritual guide one has never even seen can lead into this experience. This is well-documented by the Bhakti and Sufi poets who wrote enraptured songs and poems in celebration of the Divine. Devotion is clearly the practice of many Christian mystics as well.

Many people are awakened following an exposure to *shaktipat*. In some traditions, most notably that of Siddha Yoga (the Yoga of the Masters), Kundalini is activated by the guru. Once transmitted, the seed can lie dormant in the follower until the right moment, when he or she is awakened, perhaps lifetimes later. Some schools of yoga teach that one can prepare for this process for lifetimes, but that the awakening is ultimately an act of grace.

In the ancient traditions, those who awakened Kundalini were always advised and supervised by a teacher or guru, who by his/her nature could see into and recognize the unique needs of each devotee. Because of this, classical literature was not designed to address the problems of Kundalini, nor reveal recommendations for their resolution. This does not mean difficulties did not exist, especially for individuals following yoga practices without supervision. Many traumatic symptoms were described in Gopi Krishna's autobiography, published in 1974. He was surprised that thousands of people identified with his problems and wrote to him for advice regarding their own experiences.

The following of practices that lead to a direct experience of "God" is not a new or radical idea, but is in fact one of the oldest practices in history, being a primary focus of ancient scriptures. It is also a cornerstone of many shamanic rituals. But it is a radical spiritual movement for anyone raised under the influence of western psychology and religion, which holds the ego as central to the self, and prefers a God-archetype that is a myth of the all-knowing and judging father. Thus to traditional psychology, being religious implies a regression to a child-like state (submission to the father or merging with the mother); and to fundamentalist Christians, introspection and altered-states of awareness are full of risk and therefore evil, because people may have experiences antithetical to the doctrine. These kinds of convictions cannot be supported by those who delve deeply into their own psyches, and find there a tremendous urge toward spiritual liberation, or a desire to know "God" directly, which pulls them paradoxically more deeply into themselves, until they penetrate beyond awareness of form and thought.

In addition to exploring ancient eastern paths, many people are discovering new methods of finding spiritual meaning and integration. Many westerners have a facility and passion for experimentation and plunge actively into the mysteries of science or religion with little concern for consequences. Some are practicing with great intensity one or another process to encourage Kundalini awakening, believing it will bring them peace, bliss, transformation, wisdom, power or other benefits.

Because of my research and work as a transpersonal psychotherapist I frequently discover new friends and clients who come to me to talk of their radical experiences of spiritual emergence. They are generally sane and rational individuals, talking of energy, out-of-body experiences, overwhelming physical and emotional upheavals, transcendent or spontaneous sexual experiences, psychic awareness, consciousness, light and bliss. They struggle with the inevitable conditions that occur when the transpersonal or collective Self confronts the ego-self. They hope to develop a spiritual lifestyle, and to hold a unitive perspective in a culture that is too preoccupied with economics and conflict to acknowledge the existence of mysticism, and relegates it to the ramblings of inconsequential and possibly "dysfunctional" saints in ecclesiastical history.

Those who have these experiences are forming a quiet counter-culture of unlikely companions who know that ego-consciousness is only part of the capacity of the human condition, and the lesser part at that. They have come to this point through spiritual practices, meditation programs, near-death experiences, or because of breathwork or Reichian-based body therapies, acupressure, and biofeedback. A few simply wake at night as if caught on a electrical wire, and are challenged to discover the meaning of it. If the heart is very open they may feel uncontrollably in love, yet with no love-object, unless there is a vision of Jesus, Lord Krishna, or another guide or saint to contain the projection. Some feel wired and charged with massive energy, followed later by depletion and exhaustion. Others feel they are being make love to by the divine, or experiencing "cosmic orgasms"

This charge reorients the spiritual life and practices of the individual, and a life so altered is another aspect of radical spirituality. It is a spirituality of the entire body-mind-soul, and once fully engaged one's view of oneself and the world is irrevocably altered. It may also hold the potential, according to Gopi Krishna, to turn one into a genius, having access to universal wisdom and inspiration. He believed this is the result of the deep biological changes in the brain which can develop over years of living with this process, and he saw it as the hope for the future of the planet.

Cross-Cultural Energy Practices

There is ample evidence that the concept of spiritual awakening is not simply a phenomenon of the yogic experience, but is a process known cross-culturally by those who engage in mystical or occult practices. Such practices enable people to connect with energy, light and alternative states of consciousness, in order to bring forth what can broadly be defined as the energies of transformation. Allusions to such experiences can be found in the mystical esoteric teachings and practices of many cultures -- Assyrian, Egyptian, Celtic, Greek, Taoist, Tibetan, Judaic, Native American, Alaskan, Australian, Hawaiian, Latin and African. Shamanism, Gnosticism, Sufism, and Christian mysticism reflect the use of these tools. Theosophists, Freemasons, Rosicrucians and the alchemists also reportedly have had secret practices for awakening energy.

In Taoism *chi* is stimulated to great heights with practices that circulate light and energy through the body in specific patterns. In the ancient T'ai I Chin Hua Tsung Chih, translated by Wilhelm in The Secret of the Golden Flower (1931), connection with the primal spirit of the inner Self allows one to "overcome the polar opposites of light and darkness and tarry no longer in the three worlds (earth, heaven and hell)."[1] In Taoist practices, in order to experience "primal spirit" one must subjugate ordinary consciousness or ego through the circulation of light. Through this practice the spirit comes alive, to dominate the heart, and the breath begins a continual circulation.

> Then the spirit must be allowed to dive down into the abdomen (solar plexus). The energy then has intercourse with spirit, and spirit unites with the energy and crystallizes itself. This is the method of starting the work. In time the primal spirit transforms itself in the swelling of life into the true energy. At that time, the method of the turning of the millwheel must be applied, in order to distill it so that it becomes the Elixir of Life. That is the method of concentrated work.[2]

This work also describes a "backward-flowing method" of turning sexual desire downward, and in the moment of release, using the mind to lead the energy back upwards so that it penetrates the "crucible of the creative" (the third eye, between the eyebrows). This is similar to practices of Tantric and Tibetan yoga that awaken energy at the base of the spine, then move it upward into the third eye or through the crown of the head.

Other Taoist practices use the breath to circulate streams of energy during prescribed time intervals, indicating that inhalation is to be accompanied by the sinking of the abdomen and exhalation by the lifting of it, with the emphasis on creating a "backward-flowing movement". Thus while inhaling the "lower energy-gate" is opened and energy rises upward along the spinal cord; and while exhaling, the "upper energy-gate" is closed and the stream of energy flows downward along the front line of the body. These practices are said to create in time an embryo which is "in reality the spiritual breath-energy of the ego". The spirit must penetrate the "breath-energy" (the soul), then the "breath-energy" envelops the spirit." The energy is said to come out of the top of the head, once it is strong enough.[3]

Shamans were also known to use initiatory experiences involving healing trances and light. According to Metzner (1986) "The explorer Rasmussen quotes an Eskimo shaman as saying, 'Every real shaman has to feel *qaumaneq,* a light within the body, inside his head or brain, something that gleams like fire, that enables him to see in the dark, and with closed eyes see into things which are hidden, and also into the future".[4]

Waters (Book of the Hopi, 1963) indicates that the Hopi Indians of North America have always known about Kundalini, and the subtle body, a complex invisible energy system which explains the Kundalini process in East Indian terms. The Hopi taught:

> The living body of man and the living body of the earth were constructed in the same way. Through each ran an axis. Man's axis being the backbone, the vertebral column, which controlled the equilibrium of his movements and his functions. Along this axis were several vibratory centers which echoed the primordial sound of life through out the universe or sounded a warning if anything went wrong.[5]

The Hopis described the soft spot at the top of the head as the "'open door through which (one) received his life and communicated with his Creator" and which hardened during the last phase of creation, then reopened at death to allow the soul to exit. They identified a thinking center, which lay below the soft spot; the throat center, as the source of vibration and sound; the heart center, as the source of goodness and purpose; and the solar plexus center, which was "the throne in man of the Creator himself. From it He directed all the functions of man".[6]

Some African cultures also have teachings and rituals associated with the raising of energy. Kripananda cited evidence of African cultures who performed rituals that suggest awareness of Kundalini energy or an experience akin to it, describing the practices of the !Kung Bushmen of Africa as studied and filmed by John Marshall on an expedition under the auspices of Harvard University. The majority of tribe members learned to perform intense dances which heat up energy (*n/um*), in order to attain a transcendent state (*kia*) that they believed allowed them to participate in eternity. *N/um*, which is initiated and controlled by a *n/um* master, rises from the base of the spine to the skull where *kia* then occurs. The report stated that this energy was seen not as a physical substance but as "energy or power, a kind of supernatural potency whose activation paves the way for curing." Kripananda said the experience is described by some participants as feeling as though they have a hole in their heads about two inches wide, which extends like an empty column down the spine.[7]

This dance is echoed in another ancient rite of "royal consecration" or "Baptism of Water" described by Eliade in Yoga: Immortality and Freedom (1969). A mandala is drawn by means of two cords or by laying down colored rice powder: a white circle traces its outer limits, and the inner circle is composed of five different colors. In the center stand images of gods, vases of incense, flowers, and branches laid out in the form of triangles (which encourage the descent of the gods). The disciple draws a small mandala around the feet of the guru, and offers himself and a girl as a gift. The guru then puts five drops of sacred substances on his tongue, gives him appropriate mantras, and consecrates the incense, after which he brings on "possession by the furious god". The initiate recites the mantras and

> ...inhales vigorously, whereupon Vajrapani, the angry god, takes possession of him and he begins to sing and dance, imitating the traditional gestures of wrathful divinities. This rite allows the forces of the unconscious to invade the disciple, who, by confronting them burns all fear and timidity. Then, chiefly by mudras, he invokes the five peaceful divinities, the Saktis of the five Tathagatas, and becomes calm again. [8]

At this point the initiate is blindfolded, throws a flower into the mandala, and the section into which it falls indicates the deity most especially favorable to him. He then begins a "march toward the center" of the mandala, which corresponds to approaching "the center of the world." Here he is in a sacred space, outside of time, and performs a series of meditations which "help him to find the gods in his own heart", and to realize in a vision "the eternal process of periodic creation and destruction of worlds, and this allows him to enter the rhythms of the cosmic great time and to understand its emptiness."[9]

Many of the aspects of these rituals are reenacted by Westerners doing breathwork, when they hyperventilate, move their hands in mudras, and plunge mentally into altered states of consciousness where they may encounter sensations and visions as diverse as fighting off monsters, performing ritual dances and seeing inner guides or deities. The experiences of becoming aware of "the gods in one's own heart", of the destruction the worlds, of "entering the rhythm of cosmic great time" and of understanding emptiness are also frequently described as part of the experience of spiritual awakening, and will be evident in many of the personal accounts recorded in later chapters of this book.

More scientifically-inspired, the Alchemists pursued a search for the secret of life and a transformative substance which could turn base metals into gold. Undoubtedly they sought Kundalini, the life force which could transform the ordinary conditions of human embodiment. Swiss psychiatrist C.G. Jung believed they were "projecting upon matter and chemical transformation the whole gamut of the deep unconscious."[10] European alchemist Paracelsus spoke of "the light of nature" and claimed that psychic perception and clairvoyant dreams were caused by this light. It enables one to "search out supernatural things". These lights were described as "fiery sparks" coming from the world soul and as "seeds of a world to come", sprinkled throughout the great cosmos.[11]

Yet it appears that Kundalini is not a physical property that can be identified through scientific methods (at the present time). It is not housed in the physical body in the way one ordinarily thinks of it, which is why western medicine has failed to recognize it. Instead, it is part of the subtle body, a less visible energy system.

Kripananda says the Cabala, the system of exoteric Hebrew theosophy, indicates 22 graphs that are used as letters in the Hebrew alphabet and are 22 proper names originally used to designate different states or structures of the one cosmic energy, which is the essence of all there is. He quotes Suares who wrote that the decoding of Genesis is a process of penetrating an unknown world of cosmic energies, and that the names in the Book of Genesis, when read according to the Cabalistic code, are actually abstract formulas of cosmic energy focused in the human psyche. Suares said that in certain traditions the serpent in the Garden of Eden was actually called Kundalini, and is the resurrection of Aleph, the principle of all that is and all that is not, from its earthly entombment.[12]

According to Elaine Pagels, the Gnostic Gospels, 52 (extant) texts from the early centuries of Christianity, included secret mystic gospels, poems, descriptions of the origin of the universe, myths, magic and instruction for mystical practices. They advocated seeking God by taking oneself as the starting point, described the Self and the Divine as identical, spoke of enlightenment and included techniques of spiritual discipline and meditation. One text suggests a chant of sacred words and vowels which bring one into an ecstatic state. Pagels describes visions, ecstatic experiences and out-of-body experiences recorded by a writer called Allogenes, who saw "holy powers" that offered him specific instruction, which suggests involvement with the energies of Kundalini:

> O Allo(g)enes, behold your blessedness...in silence, wherein you know yourself as you are, and seeking yourself, ascend to the Vitality that you will see moving. And if it is impossible for you to stand, fear nothing; but if you wish to stand, ascend to the Existence, and you will find it standing and stilling itself... And when you receive a revelation...and you become afraid in that place, withdraw back because of the energies. And when you have become perfect in that place, still yourself.[13]

Later Christian mystics often described experiences which correlate with yogic definitions of experiences related to Kundalini, although generally body sensations were not described. Hildegard of Bingen (1098--1179) left a remarkable record of spiritual illuminations in her writing and art which corresponds in some ways to visions and experiences of the yogis. She described a vision of "a most quiet light and in it burning with flashing fire the form of a man in sapphire blue," which is similar to Swami Muktananda's vision of a blue pearl, in the heart of which is a blue God. (Indian gods Krishna and Rama are both blue beings.) Hildegard frequently related fire and flashing lights to the mystic experience. She once described the Trinity as "The Father is brightness and this brightness has a flashing forth and in this flashing forth is fire and these three are one". She called the Creator a "living light", the Son, "flash of light", the Spirit, "fire which binds all things together, tying together eternity and equality so that they are one -- this is like tying a bundle together, everything would fall apart otherwise."[14] This is very similar to the yogic concept of Kundalini as the source and substance of all consciousness and creation, containing everything, and as residual energy holding the physical being in stasis until its eruption.

Also in a way similar to many Indian mystics, writing became an essential response of the spiritual process for Hildegard. "Beaten down by many kinds of illnesses, I put my hand to writing. Once I did this, a deep and profound exposition of books came over me. I received the strength to rise up from my sick bed, and under that power I continued to carry out the work to the end, using all of ten years to do it." She also wrote about breath: "If we human beings whose natural disposition may correspond to that breath of the world inhale this altered air and exhale it once again so that the soul can receive this breath and carry it even further into the body's interior, then the humors of our organism are altered."[15]

Other Christians whose work and descriptions of personal experiences echo portions of yogic scriptures are Meister Eckhart, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Catherine of Siena, St. John of the Cross, St. Paul, St. Teresa, Teilhard de Chardin, Jacob Boheme and Emanuel Swedenborg, to mention only a few.

Theosophy, a metaphysical system that attracted thousands of people at the turn of the century, incorporated and elaborated on Tibetan and yogic practices, and detailed an extensive philosophy related to the subtle body, and seven rays of energy and healing. The Theosophists contributed greatly to the publishing and popularizing of eastern books and teachings in the West, and although their descriptions of the subtle body vary slightly from yogic theory, many of their teachings are still widely read and practiced. Krishnamurti, a prominent

Indian teacher of the 20th century, whose Kundalini experiences were described in two biographies, spent most of his childhood being trained and initiated in Theosophical practices, although he later severed his philosophical alignment with them.

Some spiritual groups encourage the activation and flow of energy or the cultivation of psychic openness in the body during specific forms of their devotional practices -- among these are the Quakers, Shakers, Subud, and some charismatic groups. The shaking phenomenon that may occur during these practices appears similar to a Kundalini experience, but it is more likely a sign of heightened pranic activity. (Pranic energy, more completely described in chapter three, operates all the directional movement and activities of the physical system, can be expanded through a variety of practices, and is much more easily contacted than the latent Kundalini energy.) I have talked with a number of people who experience this phenomenon of shaking involuntarily, especially during body therapy or meditation. Many have experienced it once, following a stressful event. Others have felt it during Subud practices (a trance-like spiritual practice which encourages the movement of energy and body motions, and appears to open psychic and healing potentials), while receiving or performing healing, and at other times.

Whether trance states that arouse energy during environmentally controlled rituals (such as described by Kripananda and Eliade) are a true arousal of Kundalini is also questionable, since the experiences are contained within specific boundaries and do not necessarily promote a life-long change in consciousness. I would assume that for shamans and medicine people, as opposed to those who simply participated in tribal ritual, a more permanent energy shift was activated, and in fact there are similarities between descriptions of Shamanic initiations and Kundalini awakenings. Communal rituals appear to heighten access to the psychic and healing phenomena associated with Kundalini, and may represent a way in which primitive cultures could temporarily raise pranic energy and increase alpha levels of their brain-waves, in order to gain insights for cultures which had not yet developed intellectual function.

All of the observable movements in these practices, as well as in those who have awakened Kundalini, are pranic releases, but a genuine Kundalini experience continuously promotes major changes in both mind and body. It is possible that pranic energy may increase gradually before an awakening, or Kundalini may release small amounts of energy, like steam from a pressure cooker, during states of intense altered consciousness, and return back to her resting place afterwards. But once there is a full awakening the subject will experience her activity constantly, until transformation is complete.

After studying many cases of Kundalini awakening in the literature and conducting dozens of personal interviews I have concluded that this experience often occurs in stages. Most people report a preliminary experience of strong energy and spiritual awareness, bliss or samadhi experiences, years before a more intense and difficult encounter with Kundalini. These preliminary experiences or occasional movements and releases of energy may spontaneously prepare one for the later awakening. Although many practices may provide preparation for an awakening there is little evidence to indicate a consistency in what practices will awaken Kundalini, and there seems to be a significant factor of either "grace" or psychic preparedness over which the aspirant has little control.

Although many experiences appear to be associated with pranic energy and Kundalini, and many cultural and spiritual practices are worth examining in order to authenticate the universal application of this process, it is the yogic scriptures that most thoroughly and conscientiously document these events and offer teachings related to them.

Kundalini as the Great Goddess

As noted earlier, some of the classical literature of Kundalini describes her as the great goddess. In The Laksmi Tantra, an ancient Pancaratra text (the oldest surviving Visnuite sect in India) there is a dialogue between Laksmi (another name for the goddess Kundalini) and Sakra, a devotee. Sakra did divine penance by standing motionless on a piece of wood on one foot, observing silence and surviving on air alone for 2000 years, with hands and face turned upward to the sky.

The goddess then appeared and he asked to know the nature of truth. She told him she was Kundalini and all other goddesses as well, and advocated her worship as the Great-Mother Goddess. She described herself as a supra-metaphysical principle. Then she presented a detailed guide on how to live a spiritual life which included rituals, meditation, constantly engaging in the repetition of mantra, practicing loyalty, self-restraint, sobriety, intelligence, non-violence, self-control and generosity. She advocated meditating in the first part of the night, sleeping the remaining two parts, and she recommended reading scriptures in the afternoon in order to realize the Self, without being distracted by greed, attachment or hatred.[16]

This beautiful scripture describes in detail the essential role of Kundalini (or Shakti) in human existence, inseparable from Siva, and the creator of all form. It shows the levels of experience of the jiva, or individual embodied soul, and indicates that Kundalini decides when her grace will descend to awaken one to higher consciousness. It presents the design of the material universe, and the process of God-realization in the soul. The nature of letters, sound and mantra (repetitive Sanscrit prayers and tones) are explained. The purpose of mudras (yogic hand movements that affect concentration, energy and consciousness), and their function in the scheme of creation is presented. Kundalini is characterized as motivated by the urge to create. "With a billionth fraction of myself I voluntarily embark on creation by differentiating myself in two separate (particles) of which one is conscious and the other is the objects of its knowledge." [17]

The joy and love of the Goddess for her creation resonates throughout this text, and it would be reassuring to anyone on a spiritual path. It conveys a sense of the Great Mother Goddess within each being who knows the deeper truths of the soul purpose. In the following passages Laksmi describes herself to Sakta.

> The way to obtain liberation from the bondage of the material world is to worship Laksmi, the Visnu-Sakti. One should abandon all other activity and concentrate solely on propitiating the Goddess either di-

> rectly, or indirectly through Visnu, in order to obtain spiritual release.[18]
>
> Every manifestation of God is through Sakti's manifestation. She is God's supreme will and acts under his direction. The universe is the manifestation of Sakti...
>
> I, the eternal Goddess, am the object of all the Vedas; I am the life-principle of the universe and the potent force behind all creation...
>
> I am recognized by the wise as the bliss and tranquillity inherent in each state of being ....(After) discovering me and propitiating me the jiva (individual soul) washes away all klesas (evil tendencies) and blows away the dust of impressions; whereas the jiva, that has)already severed its fetters through meditations (yoga) fuses with true knowledge and attains me, who am Laksmi and whose nature is supreme bliss. [19]

Laksmi also describes the state of the jiva or soul who attains union with her, giving encouragement to those struggling through the awakening and integrating stages of the process. She cites some of the gains of this experience as freedom from all restriction and limitations, awareness that no single material or immaterial object exists that is not infused with I-hood, and perfect tranquillity. The conscious Sakti is described as flawless and pure, consisting of consciousness and bliss.

Laksmi describes the jiva as doing five things when contained in the human body: it makes contact with objects, gets attached, ceases attachment of one for another, has an impression left behind, and eradicates the impression. This destruction, like fire, has the propensity to destroy everything within reach. This describes to some extent what one is primarily experiencing once the Kundalini is fully awakened. It is the change of consciousness from the being who is attached, to the one who has destroyed everything within reach. The fire which demolishes the ordinary psychic orientation does not have to be felt physically, it is a psychic fire as well, burning away the former parameters of identification. She says "When in consequence of the advent of pure knowledge the jiva discards its limitations, then freed from every shackle it becomes illuminated." [20]

Although the boon of illumination is appealing to Westerners, they have many defenses against burning away ego attachments, and it is a major upheaval of consciousness to discover that many of the former interests and involvement's of life have become irrelevant. There is a tendency to avoid serious consideration of the demands for change instigated by a spiritual life and to hope that "enlightenment" is all accomplished in some nice, neat, and all-inclusive meditation experience. The truth is that mystical experiences force people to find new meanings in human experiences, and encourage them to live in a style that is indifferent to ego satisfactions. This experience is akin to falling in love with a Goddess who is utterly fascinating and obsessively demanding of all of one's attention, forgoing any other temptation.

Sakti or Kundalini is said to help one become liberated in two ways -- creating the means to experience liberation, and instilling the inclination to seek her favor to obtain emancipation. In other words the Self creates the means of its own liberation, and instills in one the desire to become free. Laksmi proposes a method of self-surrender in this tantra, with advice that might be useful to spiritual aspirants or those who wish a gentler relationship with Kundalini. (For it is often fear, resistance and misinterpretation of what is happening that makes this process painful.) She advises one to resolve to conform to God's desire, to abandon all acts that displease God, to have a firm conviction God will protect those who choose God as sole protector, and to practice self-surrender and humility. Thereby one becomes free of misfortunes such as fear, sorrow, exhaustion, selfish activity and desire, self-interest and pride, and is sheltered in God alone. One becomes benevolent toward all beings, based on the con-viction "I exist in all beings"; and will drop all hostility and arrogance. She recommends prayer and the deep-rooted conviction that God will protect you.[21]

This tantra presents a god and a goddess archetype that are supportive and nurturing of the awakening process, because they themselves are part of all living things, and want to protect us during this time of transition. It is useful to remember that in the eastern cosmology this "God" is a quality of all-encompassing consciousness of which living beings are a part and which we can trust implicitly as being the source and sustenance of our lives. To surrender to this God is to surrender to the Tao, to trust that everything is already perfect, even that which ego does not accept nor understand.

Yet even should one follow the scriptures precisely, and surrender to the Tao perfectly, it seems likely that each experience with Kundalini would still be unique. A significant factor of my findings was that there are many ways one can be opened to this process, with responses that are varied and unpredictable, and yet there is a resonance of common features that make Kundalini experiences recognizable. Individual encounters with her are as particular as individual faces. We always recognize it is a face we are looking at, but the differences between faces are more striking than the similarities. It is not so easy to recognize Kundalini, until one knows her well, but it is important we don't misjudge her, because the wrong approach to treatment can strangle the potential of the emergent Self.

The Goddess & The Self

Now I have identified Kundalini both as the Self and as a Goddess, and in fact both positions are clearly supported in scriptures. She is a Goddess, also identified as Shakti in her more cosmic condition, because she is that which creates form, which molds through an intricate energy arrangement the form of each living being. It is said that when Kundalini awakens she rushes upward, through the spine, in order to reunite with her beloved in all his splendor. But in fact, she can never be separate from him, only expanded into more and more awareness and expression of him. Both are intrinsically interwoven into every atom of the universe. How can this Goddess then also be the Self?

The Goddess is a personification, an archetype, representing our personal innate connection with the Source of All, with eternal existence, with wisdom beyond that of which the mind can conceive. She is the creative or form-producing agent of the Divine, residing in each living being. This energy of Kundalini has created a template and activated each of us as unique individuals who bring into the world varied conditions -- thought-forms, energies, mental and emotional characteristics, physical strengths and vulnerabilities, potentials. In eastern theory this form of "us" is activated through our nadis, a complex network of invisible energy flows, and our five kosas (sheaths) contained in three subtle bodies. All of the energy we normally have access to, be it to move, dance, swallow, belch, eliminate, speak, etc. is part of the activity of this energy, distributed through a network of thousands of nadis, in energy forms called pranas.

Prana is known as *Chi* or *Ki* in Chinese and Japanese medicine, respectively. Methods of managing it, balancing it, and enhancing it have been well known in eastern cultures for thousands of years. Yet it remains enigmatic in the West. According to the Indian subtle body system, after Kundalini enters the fetus and activates the pranic system, the residual energy coils 3 1/2 times at the base of the spine, and goes into a dormant state. The mind becomes engaged in the process of living, and we identify with our bodies, our genetic heritage and our mental, sensate and emotional processes, separating from any awareness of the Self, or the Soul, or the source of our existence, however one wishes to identify it.

The word "self" is used in several forms in psychology. The most common is to place the "self" as a central unifying aspect of the psyche around which one forms identity and creates experience, commonly correlated with the ego. The awareness of and stability of this self is based on early childhood experiences, according to many western theorists. This is indeed a useful model, and practices that strengthen the sense of this self are very important for enhancing one's psychological health and sense of wholeness. Some therapists would view the Self as a more highly evolved center in the psyche, superior to the ego, not entangled in the emotional traumas and conditioned responses of the psyche, but nonetheless a "personal" entity.

Swiss psychiatrist C.G.Jung identified the "Self" as a center of consciousness separate from ego, which possesses an absolute authority in the psyche, and around which all other factors, both conscious and unconscious, circumnambulate. According to Jungian analyst Esther Harding, when the Self functions strongly in a human being it produces a preoccupation with the inner, subjective life, and exerts a non-personal compelling power over the individual. She calls this "finding the God within."[22] Harding believed this Self can never entirely replace the ego, as continuation demands some egoic sense.

Jung's perspective is similar to eastern views of Self, but we might say that in the East the Self is viewed more profoundly, as the single source of all existence. It is the center of all experience. This Self is the core of one's being, of which the personal self is only a reflection, and the Kundalini energy/consciousness is its essence. The Self is the consciousness, wisdom and intention of our creation and predetermines what is brought into our experiences, emotions and minds, while we remain unaware.

This Self is more primal (that is, pre-existing, although unlikely to be conscious in its pre-existent state), essential and eternal, than the personality self. It is more difficult to connect with consciously, although it may spontaneously reveal itself at times, providing awe-filled moments like many described in mystical literature. It may appear in visions or numinous dreams, through experiences of light or bliss during meditation and at other rare moments, or flood one with sudden knowing and recognition of profound truths or ecstasy.

It seems that experiences of the Self are sometimes accompanied by archetypal encounters with Gods and Goddesses, saints relevant (or even non-relevant) to the tradition of the subject, or transforming symbols such as those often encountered in a deep Jungian analytical process. In such cases the Self is leading consciousness into archetypal realms, providing bridges through which we can come to understand the core of our experience as humans, along with the potential of the numinous. These archetypal forces determine the patterns that we live out in our lives. At higher stages of spiritual evolution this higher Self loses its "personal-ity", and becomes the Self of all, and one experiences the interrelatedness of all creation as one Self. The experience of individuation moves consciousness from a false and adapted self into the knowing of the personal Self and ultimately into glimpses of the collective Self, while the Kundalini experience tends to move consciousness from the personal Self into the collective Self.

Kundalini & Western Therapies

Another Jungian analyst, Erich Neumann (1961), writing of numinous experiences and their impact on the psyche, could well have been describing Kundalini when he said:

> The numinous content possesses a fascination, a richness beyond the power of consciousness to apprehend and organize, a charge of energy surpassing consciousness. Hence the encounter with it always leads to an upheaval of the total personality and not only of consciousness. In every confrontation of the ego with the numinous, a situation arises in which the ego gets 'beside itself', it falls or is wrenched out of its shell of consciousness and comes back to itself only in changed form. [23]

Neumann clearly knew the spiritual processes of the psyche, and his words suggest the reasons why the Kundalini process is sometimes put in the hands of a therapist, for those experiencing it sense they are changing radically. They may feel disengaged from their former sense of self, engage in erratic or irrational behaviors, see visions, or make involuntary movements that they formerly identified only with the mentally ill. Besieged as well with physical changes, pains and random symptoms, they often wonder if they are dying, or they feel guilty of psychosomatic excesses.

The issue of Kundalini awakening should be an area of special concern to therapists who see clients with spiritual concerns or practices because persons experiencing it are frequently mistakenly diagnosed and inadequately treated. The average therapist or physician has not heard of it and has no spiritual context with which to integrate it. Gopi Krishna wrote of a friend who experienced the symptoms and went to a psychologist who told him the phenomenon was "quite unknown in the domain of psychology and must be a delusion of some sort or an unconscious impulse finding its way into surface consciousness". He claimed there are countless cases of spontaneous awakening of Kundalini that go unnoticed, or that trail off into insanity because the experience is not understood and proper advice is not available. "Apart from psychosis" says Krishna," there are also many people in whom the awakening of Kundalini leads to neurosis and other psychic disorders. They lead an unbalanced life without crossing the border into the territory of the incurably insane. There are also others who, while having the experiences, manage to continue in the normal tenor of their lives."[24]

In addition to the possibility of seeing clients who have inadvertently awakened Kundalini, some therapists use breathing and concentration practices that are similar to ancient yogic methods for opening this energy. One of the most common of these is breathwork. Breathing exercises are also used in behavior therapy (as in the process of progressive relaxation), as a preparation for most biofeedback training, to correct irregular breathing patterns, and to treat hypertension. A few people have reported using brainwave biofeedback equipment to reach altered states in which they believe Kundalini energy awakened. I have personally seen energy movements similar to those occurring with Kundalini awakening appear during and subsequent to transpersonal therapy sessions involving Holotropic Therapy (a form of breathwork), as taught by Dr. Stanislav and Christina Grof, and Radiance Breathwork, as taught by psychologists Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks. During these neo-Reichian bodywork processes clients following Grof's methods will lie down and deeply relax, with eyes closed, focus on breathing and breathe more quickly than usual, accompanied by intense music for periods of up to two hours. Usually this process is done in a group, with a partner sitting beside the breather as a quiet support system.

According to Grof, as tensions build in the body, bands of intense constriction tend to develop in regions associated with the chakras, and also along the arms, hands, legs and feet, causing pressure or even pain. Grof discounts the typical medical response to this "hyperventilation syndrome", which has been treated with tranquilizers, injections of calcium, and a paper bag placed over the face when it occurs in neurotic patients. He says the use of hyperventilation for self-exploration and therapy proves this response incorrect. "With continued breathing, the bands of tight constriction, as well as the carpopedal spasm (contractions of hands and feet), tend to relax instead of increasing, and the individual eventually reaches an extremely peaceful and serene condition associated with visions of light and feelings of love and connectedness".[25]

He reports that this exercise stimulates shifts in consciousness so that a client may go into altered states which release archetypal images; memories of early life; birth, pre-natal, or past-lives; free-flowing emotions; yogic postures and mudras; ancient, exotic dance movements and rituals; and major energy releases. He believes one out of three participants will enter transpersonal states of consciousness within the first hour of this process. Their experiences may include telepathy, out-of-body or astral phenomena and visions of deities or demons. [26]

These events also frequently accompany Kundalini awakening, and it is apparent that some people who do breathwork may open into the Kundalini experience in the same ways that people who practice yoga and pranayama breathing exercises may also awaken it. It is also likely that different kinds of breathing rhythms access different areas of consciousness, as the breath impacts various parts of the body/mind system. Tantric yogis teach that breathing through the left or right nostrils, or through both nostrils simultaneously, the rate of the breath, and the portions of the nostrils the breath touches all have significant affect on health, longevity, moods, the outcome of activities undertaken, and one's state of consciousness. An entire science of diagnosis for both physical and psychological conditions exists which is based on observation of the breathing patterns, and mastery of the breath is believed to lead to mastery in life.

This discussion of breath has several implications for a therapist, in addition to pointing out the possibility that therapy involving breathing techniques accidentally (or deliberately!) may awaken pranic or Kundalini activity. If a range of breathing rhythms and patterns activate varied states of consciousness it would seem possible for people who have knowledge of the system to activate specific kinds of psychological processes. This information might also explain the wide range of spontaneous emotional and physiological activity that one observes in persons doing Holotropic or Radiance Breathwork, as well as in hypnotherapy, acupressure and other forms of bodywork. Another consideration for a therapist treating a person with unpleasant symptoms is that through proper understanding of pranayama (yogic breathing) techniques the system may be warmed up or cooled down, or brought into a better balance. Because of the use of breathing techniques in many transpersonal therapy practices, and because many Westerners are currently practicing eastern meditation and breathing techniques, it is becoming imperative for therapists to have a solid understanding of the Kundalini process.

Eastern-Western Synthesis of Radical Spiritual Experiences

This book synthesizes the concepts of eastern spirituality and subtle physiology with the new experiences and conditions now appearing in the West.

Indirectly it also explores the question of how ego consciousness and spiritual awareness may be synthesized in an individual who feels drawn to know the Self, but is entangled in the perplexities of dissolving ego-consciousness in a society that views this as insanity. It presents an emerging paradigm, one that uses eastern and western modalities to engage the transpersonal Self, and offers new models for the experience and integration of spiritual consciousness. The teachings of the East are rich in interpretation of the supraconscious elements of the human psyche. Western theologians and psychotherapists must release the rigidity of their adherence to western perspectives and open to the possibility that a profound wisdom about spiritual matters existed thousands of years before Christ. It is possible that the ancients cared far more about these pathways and openings to the Self than the majority of modern intellectuals, scientists and even clergy who have pursued mastery of the universe on their own terms since the Crusades. And it is fortunate that some mystics have chosen to safeguard this wisdom until such times as a sufficient number of people were willing to integrate it back into the culture.

Now is clearly the time in the West, not only to honor and value this wisdom, but to enhance and expand the evolution of this new paradigm, so that wide-spread spiritual awareness can revitalize an ailing society. I suspect those who are having this experience today will eventually create a new model, bringing forth the wisdom of the East and integrating it with the experimental and creative aspects of the West, to provide groundwork for the future emergence of wide-spread spiritual experience. They are the forerunners of an evolving spiritual consciousness -- paradoxically, because in fact this is in no way a new experience, but is, in fact, the most ancient and consistent of human experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

ACROSS THE SPECTRUM: EXPERIENCES WITH KUNDALINI

The life-changing experiences that occur during the months and years of a Kundalini process are physiological, emotional, and spiritual. People become absorbed in dramatic episodes that can be alternately painful, humorous and ecstatic. Each individual demonstrates a unique pattern, unpredictable and varying in intensity and duration. For some people symptoms occur primarily in the middle of the night, when defenses are down and the psyche is in a state of relaxation. Others may feel tormented with painful physical problems that defy diagnosis, and symptoms that move inexplicably from one body organ to another. A few report overwhelming emotions and physical waves of orgasmic-like sensations. The symptoms observed during Kundalini awakening fall into seven primary categories

1. Pranic movements or kriyas

These may be intense involuntary body movements, shaking, vibrations, and jerking, or sensations of electricity, tingling, and waves of energy flooding the body. In many cases kriyas cause the body to bend and flow into unusual postures. The term kriya is sometimes defined in yoga as "the power of assuming any and every form."[1]

2. Physiological problems

These may include the emerging of a latent illness or pseudo-illness, apparent heart problems, gastrointestinal disorders, nervous problems, eating disorders, and pains occurring in various parts of the body, especially along the spine and in the head. There are many internal sensations such as heat, burning, itching, out-of-body or expanded senses, high sensitivity, hyperactivity, lethargy, extreme variations in sexual desire and other symptoms. Physical problems related to Kundalini are invariably difficult to diagnose and treat.

3. Yogic phenomena

The body may involuntarily perform yogic postures (asanas) or hand movements (mudras) never before seen by the subject, and the psyche may produce geometrical images or chants, Sanscrit words, tones and a variety of specific sounds commonly recorded in the yogic tradition.

4. Psychological upheaval

There can be an intensification of unresolved psychological issues, fear of death or insanity, mood swings, and waves of anxiety, anger, guilt, or depression as well as profound compassion, unconditional love, and heightened sensitivity to the moods of others. One feels a compelling need to recognize and resolve emotional problems, and sometimes spontaneous rituals are enacted that symbolize deeply held conflicts.

5. Extrasensory experiences

These may include atypical perceptions (lights, symbols, images of entities, the reviewing of what appears to be other lives, and visions), or auditory input (hearing a voice, music, phrase or continual inner sound), or olfactory sensations (the scent of sandalwood, perfume or incense).

6. Parapsychological experiences

Precognition, healing abilities, reading the minds of others, unusual synchronicities, electrical sensitivity and psychokinesis are the most commonly reported occult phenomena.

7. Samadhi or satori experiences

These states imply an absorption of consciousness into a condition of unitive awareness, and their impact is to bring on sensations of deep peace, wisdom, and sometimes experiences of light. Less complete trance states may also occur which bring tranquillity, joy, and overwhelming waves of bliss during or after meditation, and sometimes spontaneously.

Physiological Dimensions of the Kundalini Process

> My whole body changed -- my pulse raced and my heart pounded and I was hungry all the time. But I felt I could barely eat enough and in one week I lost seven pounds....Beth
>
> I had drenching night sweats, every night for weeks, so heavy I would have to change the bedding several times a night....Jay
>
> My body, particularly my right side, would frequently go into spastic movements I could not control....Mark.

Sometimes a Kundalini experience is first identified because of the unusual physiological activity it generates. It is difficult for Western medicine to grasp the connection between body symptoms and mysticism, even though a cursory glance at the writing of Christian mystics makes it clear that they endured dramatic physical problems. These have been attributed to a weak physical disposition by those who have no framework for understanding the relationship between energy, the body and religious experience. Spiritual awakening can trigger intense movement of energy and heat, and may even initiate a restructuring of the physical system in order to handle it.

In addition, an unhealthy lifestyle, especially if there is stress or a history of using alcohol or drugs, and an unnatural diet, leaves toxins in the body that are released during the Kundalini process.

Energetic activity and physical symptoms reported by experiencers fall into one of these six categories -- pranic movement or kriyas, internal physical sensations, visual problems, changes in eating patterns, temperature changes, and symptoms of physical illness or pseudo-illness. There are many variations in each case.

Pranic Movement (Kriyas)

Involuntary jerks, shaking, vibrating, or spasms.
Contractions, especially of the anus, abdomen and throat (yogic "locks")
Sudden swift movements of the arms, legs or head.
Involuntary dancing, hopping, spinning, or running at a breakneck speed.
Falling down, or becoming frozen in action, feeling stiffness and muscle rigidity.
Jerking as a major flood of energy comes up the body originating from the big toe, the foot or the base of the spine.
Making involuntary sounds.

Internal Physical Sensations

Ecstatic, blissful sensations, mild or intense, lasting a few minutes or months.
Feeling intoxicated, detached, slightly out-of-body.
Falling into a trance, staring into space.
Increased pulse rate.
Feeling as if plugged into an electric socket, or tingling, itching.
Nervous energy, hypertension, throbbing; this may be alternated with lethargy.
Nausea, abdominal pain.
Feeling a snake is inside, especially in the abdomen or crawling up the spine.
Chest pains as if having a heart attack.
Chronic or temporary pains all over the body, difficult to diagnose.
Backaches and sharp pain along the spine.
Headaches, feeling of energy buzzing in head, tingling, itching, or bugs crawling on scalp.
Electrical sensations in the head, feeling scalp is being opened.
Numbness in hands, arms or feet.
Pain or electrical sensations in big toe, toe nail darkens or falls off.
Major variations in sexual energy; spontaneous orgasms, either genital or "brain orgasms."

Sucking sensations at the cervix; itching in perineal area.
Body feeling light as air; out-of-body experiences.
Extremely sensitive hearing -- hearing voices at a great distance or hearing as if a color is associated with each tone.
Vibrations and energy coming out of the ears.
Hearing and feeling deep inner sounds.
Hyperactivity followed by exhaustion.
Hair standing on end.
The stomach swelling, as if pregnant.
The lungs spontaneously filling with air.
A sweet nectar taste coming down into the throat (called *amrita* by the yogis).

Visual Problems

Eyelids closing temporarily and refusing to open.
Temporary blindness.
Diminished vision.
Extreme sensitivity to light.
Acute vision -- seeing everything as if colors are very intense.
Seeing auras, bright lights, blinding lights, small dots of light, patterns of light.
Eyes burning.
Twitching between the brows, or attention riveted on the "third eye".

Changes in Eating Patterns

Major appetite swings -- may include inability to eat at all for several days or weeks or having a voracious appetite. May have little or no impact on weight.
Tendency to give up meat, intoxicants and drugs.
Unusual food cravings or a desire for specific herbs.

Temperature Changes

Hot flashes, sometimes with profuse sweating, burning , or heat streaming from the body.
Night sweats.
Flashes of freezing cold, sometimes alternating with heat flashes.

Hot and cold sensations in various body parts; one side of the body may be hot, the other cold.

Illness or Pseudo-Illness

Apparent heart attacks, usually false alarms; complaints the heart is not beating.
Stomach disorders and digestive problems.
Migraine headaches, tingling, pressure in scalp.
Symptoms may seem clinically to resemble epilepsy or Parkinson's disease.
Sincere conviction one is dying, with a range of vague pains and complaints.
Eruption of latent illness.
Floating pains, congestion, digestive problems and other complaints fluctuating in a variety of body organs, remitting without treatment.
Pain along spleen meridian.
Symptoms of adrenal exhaustion.
Paralysis with no identifiable cause.

These symptoms tend to be erratic, they may occur only in the middle of the night or come and go without provocation, and they are generally unresponsive to medical treatment. Their frequency and endurance are impossible to predict. Some people have little physical response during Kundalini awakening and others react primarily with intense physical reactions. Some of the most advanced yogis have reported very intense symptoms, although generally these conditions are endured for only a short period, several days or weeks.

Pain and emotional trauma are stored in the cells of the body, and when energy is expanded the result may be the release of this pain and emotion, along with memories associated with it. Some kriyas indicate a blockage or contraction at the site of such trauma. The energy can't move past the block, in the same way water will not move past a knot in the garden hose. Relief may occur if one can surrender to this process, and relax into the energy.

In many cases physical difficulties seem to abate within a year or two, if not sooner, although awareness of sensations and energy flow remains. But a few people suffer many years with physical difficulties. Some report that the body maintains a consistent level of internal vibration and never feels ordinary again, and that by tuning into it they can deepen their meditative state or produce bliss at will. Many practices such as meditation, hatha yoga, physical exercise, chanting, body therapies, breathing exercises, as well as dietary and social restrictions seems to increase, decrease or redistribute this energy.

Generally, kriyas or involuntary jerks and movements do not cause pain, and although they may be uncomfortable or embarrassing if they come at inconvenient times, people usually become accustomed to them and learn to consider their presence a reassurance that the spiritual energy is still present. They may be accompanied by sensations of bliss either during the movement or after it. They are often more intense during meditation, breathwork, body therapy, sexual activity and in periods of stress. In time a person can learn some degree of control over them, so that they may shift the body, or try a yoga posture or breath, or put awareness on another activity, and the symptoms diminish. It is also possible to use breath and visualizations to change the patterns and intensity of kriyas.

Yogi Baba Hari Dass states that Kundalini is the rising consciousness of Self and that all of the energy or movement manifestations are only the indirect effects of pranic energy movement in one who has not mastered control of pranic energies through proper pranayama practices, diet and disciplined living.[2] Other yogis also equate unusual pranic activity with insufficient purification. Madhusudandasji wrote that there are two kinds of kriyas -- one for purification, and one to manifest joy. [3]

Kriyas may indicate blockages and toxins in the body, both physical and psychological. Many yogis use Ayurvedic diets and dramatic cleansing exercises that involve swallowing cloths, vomiting salt water and other practices to remove toxins and strengthen the body so that the energy can move freely and not cause damage to the system. These practices must be carefully learned.

Gopi Krishna wrote extensively about the physical problems associated with Kundalini and said "When we admit that a regular biological process is at work in the brain to invest it with an expanded state of consciousness....it is easy to see that the emergence of the higher state of consciousness with complete clarity and precision cannot be possible all at once. Like other processes of growth it must be attended by ups and downs, divisions and distortions, to be smoothed out and straightened in the course of time. "He called those approaches to higher consciousness that ignore the biologic aspects of transcendent experience "puerile and unrealistic", and stated "There is hardly any understanding that for the transpersonal manifestations of consciousness the active participation of brain and body is essential.. It is reasonable to assume that any deep change in psychological state would be accompanied by change in the human organism and would be attended by subtle or even tangible changes in the brain and nervous system."[4]

There is controversy in the literature regarding the illness associated with Kundalini. Classical references suggest the body will eventually become free from all disease and ill health; however, it is clear that gurus and spiritual teachers are as susceptible to cancer, diabetes, heart disease and other illness as the general population. It is possible that the intensification of pranic energy activates latent illness in some who awaken Kundalini and promotes a healthier physical system in others, depending on predisposing factors which may be related to genetics or karma, depending on your perspective. Although many problems in the process pass without conclusive diagnosis or treatment, it is always advisable to have a medical examination when symptoms of disease are present.

Involuntary Yogic Activities

> One morning I felt a tug at the end of my right finger as I did the Salute to the Sun (a hatha yoga pose) and then as I bent over one leg the muscle contracted under my right knee. I leaned over my left leg to get more leverage. Suddenly my right hand grasped the leg and yanked it. It was so painful my mouth flew open to scream, but out of it came a soft sound -- "ta"....Mark.

> My body kept bending over backwards, my face nearly flat on the ground....Karena.

Westerners who have awakened Kundalini may be quite astonished to discover themselves spontaneously moving into a yogic asana, a posture of hatha yoga, which they may never have seen or learned and could not do in a normal state of consciousness. It feels as if the body takes on a purposeful movement and flow, that presses and bends them into form, without the cooperation of the conscious mind. I have speculated that this may occur because of an unconscious force that knows exactly what the body needs to release a block, and that yoga postures may have originally sprung from such movements of ancient spiritual masters. It is also possible the genetic, past-life or collective pool of experience is emerging from the unconscious at such moments in order to attract attention, or gain new awareness for the person so afflicted. It is not usually a painful experience, just puzzling.

In a similar way, some people perform hand mudras. These are symbolic gestures that represent the evolution of the universe and the eventual involution of individual consciousness back to its divine source. These graceful movements are said to center and calm the mind, and to have a significant impact on the energy system. They are part of yogic worship, signs of devotion to the cosmic source. There are many mudras and each has a specific meaning related to the creative process of nature and human life.

Unusual breathing patterns also appear unexpectedly during this process. The manipulation of the breath has many purposes in yoga including control of various body organs, movement of prana to the base of the spine to stimulate Kundalini, quieting the mind, heating or cooling the body, healing specific ailments, producing mental calm and relaxation, developing yogic powers and other tasks. Tibetan yogis may spend days unclothed in sub-zero weather practicing certain breathing practices that produce heat. Such skills constitute a science in the yogic tradition because the breath is used consciously to direct, expand or diminish prana, the primary energy of the physical system.

People experiencing Kundalini awakening sometimes breathe in unusual patterns, perhaps very rapidly or very shallowly, or not breathing at all for extended periods. This can be frightening if they do not understand the nature of such patterns, and it is rare for Westerners to have such training. Such breathing may be stimulated by physiological needs, or connections with memories in the collective unconscious, or triggered for specific healing purposes unknown to the conscious mind. They also occur during meditation practices.

A relationship with Kundalini is very much a relationship with an "otherness" within oneself that often demonstrates what appears to be intentionality all its own. Those engaged in this process have several choices -- to study yoga and come to understand these events; to develop a serious and committed spiritual orientation that incorporates this process; to accept the phenomena without much concern, trusting there is value in the unconscious impulse, or being willing to play the game if that is all it is; or to resist and become angry about the invasion. In the latter circumstance they are likely to experience the greatest difficulties of Kundalini awakening -- fear, panic, contraction and other disruptive emotions.

Still another mystery of the process is the Sanscrit words or sounds that sometimes emit from the subject who has awakened Kundalini, and the occasional movement of awareness into inner music or sound. It is unnerving to speak when one is not consciously directing it, especially if it is a foreign language that emerges. Since Sanscrit is reportedly the language of the origin of the universe -- the words through which creation was created, it must be indeed a deeply embedded primary structure of the collective unconscious. Such sounds may come to open us, to soothe us, to create new forms within us, to reunite us with primary material which lies between us and our origins. When someone is experiencing this phenomena he/she may be at very primitive levels of the deep unconscious or very refined levels of the superconscious essence, penetrating genetic or psychic layers in order to let go of the human condition.

Yogic and Tantric schools teach the resonance of certain sounds with the awakening of specific chakras, and the sound of *Om* or *Aum* as the basic core of the universe, containing all within it. Sanscrit chants and mantras are based on particular tones and forms of sound that are said to have specific results. Certain mantras, usually lengthy and complicated ones, are believed to actually create forms or results in the material world, if they are recited the correct number of times (sometimes in the millions), with appropriate devotion and breathing cadences. This is how much of the magic of yogic powers is believed to occur. Like the science of breath, the science of sound and vibration is a major cornerstone of esoteric yoga practices.

Surat Shabd Yoga, as described by Kirpal Singh, teaches how to connect with inner sound or the "radiant sound current". An aspirant is initiated with an especially charged mantra and meditates on it while focusing on the third eye center (the sixth chakra). Spiritual current may descend from above into the third eye, and from there spread throughout the body. Through concentration at this point the yogi connects with this current directly, perceiving transcendent light and sound, and making the practices of yoga which depend on prana and mind unnecessary. When contacting this spiritual energy the sensory currents are automatically drawn upward but the motor currents in the body are left untouched, so that the entry into samadhi, and the return from it, become more natural and less disruptive to accomplish. (This process is similar to what some Christians describe as occurring in their bodies when they receive a descent of the Holy Spirit, a downflowing current of spiritual energy.)

The transcendent sound and light into which the yogi merges are the essence of divine spirit, so this is considered to be a more direct method of awakening than those that focus on Kundalini and pranic energies. It bypasses completely the need for the strict physiological practices common to other schools of yoga. If transcendent sound and light is thus the primary essence of divine energy, before it is transmuted into the physiologic and biologic systems, being swept by inner music and sound would be a natural correlate of Kundalini processes as energy penetrates the third eye, and one is moving toward dissolution of identification with the body.

Hazrat Inayat Khan, a great Sufi master, has called the creation the "Music of God." He wrote that all of space is filled with abstract sound, with vibrations too refined to be audible to the human ear or eye. If one learns to capture these during meditation, focusing on them can lead to inner peace, freedom from anxieties and sorrow, the healing of illness and ultimately to the detachment of the soul from identification with the body.

Several manifestations of sound are identified by yogis, who say they are carried through the nadis of the subtle body. These are the sound of thunder, the buzzing of bees, the roar of the ocean, the jingling of bells, the twittering of sparrows, the vina, the flute, the conch shell, and Hu, a core sound of existence.[5]

In addition to hearing sounds, mantras, or tones that resonate with various chakras, certain yogic images and symbols may arise during this process. Yogis have attributed specific lotuses, colors, lights, gods and goddesses, symbols, and animals to each of the chakras, These images may appear during meditation, body therapy, breathwork, trance states, psychedelic drug use and during other altered states of consciousness. I know of no studies to correlate specific chakra openings with these images in Westerners, but they are so extensively in agreement in eastern literature we must suppose they are seen frequently in spiritual aspirants there.

Not everyone who awakens Kundalini will report these kinds of yogic experiences, and some will have them and have no idea what they are. What they suggest to me is that the science and wisdom of yoga was not created from the intellects of the ancient Rishis and teachers, but was more likely "channeled" through their personal supraconscious processes. Therefore, yoga practices are not an invention of the ancient Hindus, but a product of the Kundalini itself, bringing forth a method for others to use to unravel the egoic structures of the psyche.

Emotional & Psychological Responses to Kundalini

> I saw the world in a new way -- and it was warped and uncontrollable and I was unable to be rational. I was manic-depressive, with mood swings from euphoria to total contraction, expansion to suicidal, and thinking the energy would probably kill me anyhow....Rob.

> I started having uncontrollable bouts of weeping all of a sudden. The bout would begin in a state of great pain. I would weep

> and sob uncontrollably in a most pathetic way. Then I would come to my own automatically....B.S. Goel.[6]

> As I walked through New York City, I tried to touch people and bless them. I saw terrible faces in the clouds above the city. When the cab drove to the airport the hood flew up and I freaked out, gave the driver all my money, and walked the rest of the way. At the airport I was intensely confused and collapsed at the ticket counter....Mark.

A few of the more difficult emotional conditions that may accompany a Kundalini awakening have led some clinicians to consider this process a psychosis, a neurological disorder or a manic-depressive illness. Most individuals do not have problems this severe, but they do feel beset by unpredictable emotions and anxieties that may bring them into therapy. In addition, underlying dysfunctional patterns such as anxiety neurosis, depression, schizoid tendencies or narcissism can become exacerbated due to the energy phenomena. The following lists highlight some of the most common problems.

Emotional Conditions

Intense emotional swings
Depression, anxiety, anger, guilt.
A belief one is dying.
Temporary mental confusion and difficulty performing work tasks.
Ritualistic behaviors.
Inability to sleep.
Impulsive desires to uproot one's life.
Erratic swings in sexual desire.
Temporary gender identity issues.
Belief that people are influencing one's energy field, or that one is influencing others.
Feeling a connection with entities, light beings, creatures or guides from other dimensions.
Symptoms similar to hallucination i.e. seeing visions, or lights or hearing sounds.

Borderline tendencies i.e. indecisiveness, emotional impulsivity, scattered thoughts, and boundary issues.
Narcissistic tendencies, especially grandiosity and inflation.

Because of the similarity of some of these symptoms to those of a psychotic break, and the lack of any other diagnostic category available to categorize hallucinatory experiences, the similarity of Kundalini to psychosis has been addressed by several writers. Gopi Krishna, Lee Sannella, Itzak Bentov, and others suggest that some psychotic breaks are related to this experience having gone awry or having been inappropriately treated. Bentov estimated as many as 25% to 30% of all institutionalized schizophrenics may be victims of this misunderstanding.[7]

Psychiatrists John Perry and R.D. Laing did remarkable work in bringing people with psychotic symptoms through a transformative spiritual healing process, which raises questions and confusion about the relationship of such episodes to Kundalini. An excellent exploration of their perspectives is available in the anthology Spiritual Emergency (Grof and Grof, 1989).

I do not believe that Kundalini causes psychosis, or conversely, that the spiritual components of a psychotic experience are proof that Kundalini has awakened. But it may be possible for the two experiences to occur simultaneously due to weak ego boundaries, and the facility in touching non-ordinary states of awareness that is often manifest during a psychotic illness. It is also possible that disturbed and erratic energy fields present in psychosis may activate physiological symptoms similar to those activated by the awakened movement of Kundalini. And I agree with Bentov and others who have observed that Kundalini is frequently misdiagnosed as mental illness, leading to inappropriate treatment that may increase the potentiality for a psychotic break, or cause a long-term ego fragility that is debilitating for the patient. Lee Sannella, an ophthalmologist and psychiatrist, did a pioneering study currently published as The Kundalini Experience (1988) to differentiate between the two experiences.[8]

Frequently people fear they are mentally ill when kriyas and unfamiliar internal sensations manifest, or because they see visions or make strange sounds. If they have no context with which to understand these conditions, and if they are misdiagnosed or treated with psychotropic drugs, they may develop serious mental problems, identifying themselves as mentally ill and feeling mentally confused because of drug reactions. Often well-meaning friends and family members compound the problem with their own concern. It is important to understand the powerful psychological impact of spiritual practices and openings, and their potentiality for plunging individuals into the crisis identified by transpersonal therapists as spiritual emergency.

The Mother, who worked closely with Aurobindo and headed his organization for many years, wrote of the psychological impact of yoga practices:

> Yoga in its process of purification will lay bare and throw up all hidden impulses and desires in you. And you must learn not to hide things nor leave them aside, you have to face them and conquer them and remold them. The first effect of yoga is to take away the mental control, and the hungers that lie dormant are suddenly set free, they rush up and invade the being. So long as this mental control has not been replaced by divine control there is a period of transition when your sincerity and surrender will be put to the test.[9]

Aurobindo wrote that although we might accept emotions such as anger, desire, greed, and sexuality as natural in ordinary life, we must have mastery of them for a spiritual life. He believed an intense struggle arises in spiritual practice because the unconscious impulses are being uprooted and their "secret motive is pulled out, exposed and got rid of."[10]

He believed it was not the push toward divine union that led one to madness, but the way people with certain predispositions responded to certain energies. He said that only in three cases had he ever witnessed a case of collapse in yoga. He described the people involved as suffering respectively from sexual aberration, exaggerated ambition and megalomania, and an unbalanced and weak nervous system derived from following unruly impulses without using a strong will to restrain them. He claimed that where emotional problems were present the cause was a predisposition due to heredity, natal or birth circumstances, or insufficient nervous balance. Anxiety or excessive stress in meditation would not bring on nervous problems without these predisposing weaknesses.[11]

Issues related to the prior mental stability of spiritual aspirants are more prevalent in the West than in the East, where proper preparation and mental attitude are considered prerequisites for the practice of yoga. Several Western therapists have addressed differences between meditation practitioners in the two cultures. Engler cited a number of studies of western and eastern students of Vipassana meditation that suggest spiritual progress is more slow in Westerners. He attributed this to western students becoming fixated on the psychodynamic level of experience, as well as by an increase in fantasy, daydreaming, reverie, imagery, incessant thinking and emotional lability when practicing meditation. He noticed that they become absorbed in the content of awareness rather than simply observing process. In addition, he described them as demonstrating greater transference to teachers.

Engler observed that many who become interested in Buddhism and attended meditation retreats tended to avoid essential developmental tasks and used meditation practice as a short-cut solution for resolving personal problems.[12] He concluded at their worst these vulnerabilities and disturbances of personal identity are pathological, and that many of these students function at or close to a borderline or narcissistic level of ego organization. When this is so, embracing ideals related to egolessness can become a justification for the essential lack of self in the personality, and the person can misconstrue personal emptiness as enlightenment. The ideal of enlightenment may be assumed to be the peak of of personal perfection, erasing all mental problems, making one complete and invulnerable. This may reinforce narcissistic tendencies and the desire to feel oneself superior to others.

When issues such as borderline or narcissistic pathology are brought to the spiritual quest, or when Kundalini experiences occur spontaneously in such a person, there can be major difficulties with ego identity and spiritual integration. It is possible that some of the extreme mental fragmentation or apparent psychotic conditions attributed to spiritual awakening may fall into this category. These people are not capable of completing the deeper work of transformation until they have done the preliminary tasks of structuring a personal identity and resolving their personality disorder. They may need to leave their spiritual practices and reduce their projections before personal or spiritual development can happen.

Other complications of meditation practices, according to researchers Epstein and Lieff,[13] include intense depersonalization experiences, sometimes with agitation, anxiety attacks, tension, restlessness, extreme euphoria, and grandiose fantasies. Researchers Walsh and Roche[14] identified psychotic episodes characterized by paranoia, agitation and suicide attempts, brought on in three individuals with a history of schizophrenia, following their participation in intensive meditation retreats which included fasting and sleep deprivation. Glueck identified psychotic episodes following Transcendental Meditation (TM) training in two young psychiatric patients with previous LSD experiences.[15]

Psychologist David Lukoff has recommended the diagnosis of "mystical experience with psychotic features" for psychiatric patients who demonstrate psychotic conditions with an overlay of mystical experience, urging clinicians to develop alternative strategies to assist them. He feels that some people become psychotic in response to awakening experiences associated with spiritual practices, and it may be possible in such cases for the psychosis to become part of a growth process, with a positive outcome if appropriate treatment modalities are used. Lukoff suggests an approach that allows individuals a "wide latitude of freedom for expressing their beliefs, affects, and symbolic imagery", and placing them in a sanctuary-like residence, such as a private home or non-hospital setting, where 24-hour care is provided by friends and relatives.[16]

Erich Neumann wrote that "For the ego, the mystical encounter with the non-ego is always a borderline experience, for in it the ego always moves toward something lying outside of consciousness and its rationally communicable world. This area situated outside of consciousness is indeed, from the viewpoint of the total personality which it has transformed, the creative area par excellence, but from the viewpoint of consciousness it is an area of nothingness."[17] This would make the Kundalini process most difficult, if not impossible for people with borderline or psychotic pathology because they would become stuck in the pathology; but it is important to remember that clients may exhibit borderline or psychotic symptoms when undergoing this encounter with the numinous, even when that is not their ordinary personality style.

Aside from the risk of being labeled mentally ill, people are vulnerable to erratic emotional upheavals, as Aurobindo and The Mother suggested, during the Kundalini process. Some of the more troublesome emotions of this process are fear, doubt, anger, depression, and overpowering love projections (falling in love with someone who seems completely inappropriate, or becoming completely enamored with a guru, teacher or therapist).

Fortunately, no one experiences *all* of these conditions. It is wise to remember the uniqueness of an individual's life and previous inner work, self-discipline, intellect and emotional tendencies, and possibly even past-lives, may all have an influence on the patterns that emerge. It appears to me from the research I have conducted that individuals are likely to experience an intensification of personality issues they have always had at some level, rather than an entire onslaught of new issues.

One of the more common emotional issues is fear of death. Many people have reported extreme attacks of death-anxiety, convinced that some somatic problem is the beginning of the end of their life. Anxiety attacks often occur. The ego is confronting a death-like collapse which most likely accounts for the preoccupation with physical death during this process.

Another common condition is extreme and unpredictable mood swings, from deep depression to euphoria, sometimes happening several times a day, at other times lasting for weeks. This is associated with the bliss and awareness of transcendent realities, followed by the painful realization that one is indifferent to events and pleasures of ordinary living that were once satisfying. Sometimes the experience is more akin to the classical "dark night of the soul", when contact with the numinous feelings and experiences has vanished, and one no longer knows for certain it was real, or doubts it will return. Irina Tweedie was caught in this experience when she wrote in her journal, “All seems dark and lifeless. There is no purpose anywhere or in anything. No god to pray to. No hope. Nothing at all. A deep-seated rebellion fills the mind...only this time it mattered less than usual."[18]

The consequence of such an abandonment by the numinous is enormous emptiness until the next stage of spiritual development occurs. At this time there is a great need to cling to the memory and the vision of the early experiences, and to intensify the spiritual practices, somehow trusting there will be a next step. The emotional ups and downs might also be viewed as the swings between ego and Self-consciousness that are inevitable until one has stabilized the energy and consciousness, which is shattering the formerly-known system. Living a life that is resonant with spiritual values, resolving psychological and emotional issues, and following spiritual practices can help to stabilize the mind and body.

Visions and Sounds -- Insanity Or Divine Intervention?

> Sometimes I fell into a hypnogogic state, and suddenly entered into a third or fourth dimension, rather like wearing 3-D glasses where dimensionality shifted somewhere such as the Astral Plane. I saw incredibly beautiful nature scenes.... Margaret.
>
> Standing in the garden, with an obviously discernible form, made of subtle energy but without any kind of visibility, was the Virgin, Mary, Mother of Christ.... Jones[19]
>
> I felt Sai Baba's presence occasionally, and smelled a certain perfume when he was there....Jayne
>
> I woke up in a state of ecstasy in the middle of the night and a voice said: "This is really Kundalini, we're just taking it very easy on you!".... Chris

Perceiving visions and hearing occasional voices are experiences quite common during the process of Kundalini awakening, along with perceptions of luminosity, both in the external and the dream worlds. Such reports are found in all mystical literature and scriptures, including the Bible, and are a significant aspect of Shamanic cultures, yet are rarely taken seriously by modern intellectuals. Sometimes they are reported as part of transformative states of consciousness described in psychological literature, and are even encouraged through therapies using active imagination, guided imagery, past-life regression, and other altered state processes. Psychedelic drugs produce them. They emerge unexpectedly during meditation, but one is usually advised to allow them to pass, as they are viewed as a temporary and insignificant stage of the process. Since visions and discarnate voices are also common to the psychotic state, the spiritual initiate may be misunderstood and treated with psychotropic medication when they are reported, so mystics in modern society are well-advised to keep their visions to themselves.

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung and other analysts have pioneered work with dreams and active imagination that seriously values the spiritual nature of certain images, believing these may lead individuals to wholeness. It is notable that many of the images produced by patients engaged in the individuation process correlate with images produced by those experiencing Kundalini awakening. These include images of monsters and disasters, Gods and Goddesses, great lights, newborn beings, and symbols of crosses, swords, serpents, fire, water, light, blue pearls, crystals, triangles (sometimes intersected), circles, and spirals. In addition some people see visions of the inner-workings of their bodies; have visitations by guides, gurus or teachers occurring either visually, auditorially or intuitively; or encounter precognitive visions or voices.

Visions are images or scenes that are witnessed as if they were taking place, either externally or internally, but that are clearly out of the context of ordinary reality. They may occur while in waking consciousness, in meditation, or in the state of "tandra", a dream-like yogic state of rest, which is similar to a hypnogogic state. People sometimes awake at night to a vision or voice, but may also experience them spontaneously during waking consciousness. They are reported often in times of stress, or great psychic upheaval, as well as in times of transformation. Recent research suggests they occur frequently when people are dying, or as part of a near-death experience.

Kennett Roshi described a vision as follows:

> It superimposed itself on what was around me. I tried to close my eyes on occasion and I was absolutely forced not to...so that I would stay in a context that I knew. I knew that I was in the room and at the same time I was quite genuinely moving and doing things. I was aware of things going on around me, conversed with people, and did not leave my body.[20]

In this case the vision occurred as something outside of herself, while she observed it from a conscious state.

Edward Thornton, a British businessman and mystic, published a diary in which he described visions occurring both in meditation and waking states. His first vision appeared while he was in a conscious state, as did several subsequent visions. During an air-raid, having just finished meditation, he gazed into the darkness of a room and saw "a great dark lake surrounded by gloomy mountains. Out of the lake there emerged a naked man. He was fettered from neck, waist and, ankles in chains, and was trying to drag himself out of the water on to the shore. He was dragging himself with, what seemed to me, superhuman strength, and I felt sure that he would reach dry land. The man had obviously been submerged in the water, and was now entering a new element. But the foreboding mountains and the gloom of the dark lake did not give me the impression of a very happy future."

Thornton's visions and dreams progressively carried themes involving symbolic births in elements related to each chakra. Late at night after meditation he had an exterior vision: "It was night, and above me the full-moon was shining brightly in a clear sky. Before me was a vast altar on the top of which stood a bowl of fire. The flames were rising upwards to the moon. All this took place in a wooded glade."

Four nights later, he had another exterior vision--"I saw three gold candlesticks with a gold chalice enveloped in fire above them. This vision had an overwhelming effect on me, and I was held by what I can only describe as holy awe. This does not mean that I was in any way afraid, for the experience was more like that of a rapture." After this most of his visionary experiences were interior, occurring with his eyes closed, during meditation. In the last meditation vision recorded in his book he "beheld a total eclipse of the sun. From behind the dark image of the moon flames of fire were emerging from the hidden sun."

In daily meditations during the time he experienced visions, he was "aware of a luminous point which seemed to hold my attention. It appeared to come from the very center of my being deep within myself. As time went on this luminous point developed, and I began to see four rays, or tongues of light issuing from it in the four cardinal directions. These interior visions culminated on June 28, 1944 when eight tongues of light emanating from the central luminous point, yet not seeming to touch it, were enclosed in a circle of Chartres blue. The four tongues pointing in the cardinal directions were slightly larger than the other four lying between them."[21]

This image is similar to one of Kennett Roshi's, who reported seeing five golden columns of light emitting from her body which moved up, and then came out of a lotus blossom towards the back of her head,. She worked over a period of time with movement in and out of these columns, following the advice of the inner Self. Later they came from the Buddha mark on her forehead, or they formed a column at the base of the spine, and she was told they were related to five aspects of being a monk.

Yogic literature describes some reasons for visionary states of consciousness. Gopi Krishna said they occurred because of a heightened state of consciousness that accompanies Kundalini awakening. He said that yogis learn to visualize the upgoing current, chakras, the lotuses and letters of the alphabet which accompany each chakra, along with their respective deities, mantra sounds, hues and colors. One can expect proneness to visionary states in one with an awakened Kundalini, because it makes figments of the imagination more vivid. He believed visions and hallucination occur in the intermediate stage of the process before the brain is completely attuned to the higher functions, and that higher stages of consciousness have no visions. He thought the average adult suddenly experiencing happiness, awe and wonder needed a formative vision conforming to his preexisting ideas and concepts to avoid becoming confused.

Many yogis claim a certain reality for some visual experiences. These images are no more *maya* (delusion) than is ordinary reality, both being reflections of the mind. Swami Sivananda stated:

> The beings and objects with whom you are in touch in meditation belong to the astral world. They are similar to human beings minus a physical overcoat...they have desires, cravings, love, hatred just as human beings have...they have powers...if lustrous, they are Devatas (Gods) of mental or higher planes who come to give you Darshan and encourage you. [22]

One may feel pushed from the physical body into the new plane and need help in separating from the body and going above body-consciousness, according to Sivananda. One may see the sky or physical forms of people. These visions are either one's own mental reactions or are realities of finer planes of matter. He advises using discrimination and common sense in responding to them. The case histories I have studied reveal that many people who experience Kundalini do seem to be assisted by spiritual guides and teachers from another dimension.

Aurobindo believed one should never interfere with images which rise from within because their occurrence is a sign that inner planes of consciousness are opening and to inhibit them would mean to inhibit the expansion of consciousness and experience. He said:

> Inner vision is vivid like actual sight, always precise, and contains a truth in it. The inner vision can see objects, but it can see instead the vibration of the forces which act through the object. The mental visions are meant to bring in the mind the influence of the things they represent. The

> cosmic vision is the seeing of the universal movements -- it has nothing to do with the psychic necessarily.[23]

Aurobindo also said visions are valued by people because they are a contact with other worlds or inner worlds and all that is there. He said visions "can give a first contact with the Divine in his forms and powers; it can be the opening of a communion with the Divine, of the hearing of the Voice that guides, of the Presence as well as the Image in the heart, of many other things that bring what man seeks through religion or yoga."

Yogis often refer to visions when describing meditative experiences. Vivekananda writes that "Haloes are symbols of inner light and can be seen by the Yogi. Sometimes we may see a face as if surrounded by flames and in them read the character and judge without erring. We may have our *Ishta* (a divinity we worship) come to us as a vision, and this symbol will be the one upon which we can rest steadily and fully concentrate our mind."[24]

Kennett Roshi, the Abbess of a Zen monastery at Mt. Shasta, in California, in a radical departure from Buddhist tradition, reported a major series of visions occurring during her third kensho experience, which took place over several months, and forced her to look at many opposites slowly and deliberately. Among the images in her visions were mountains, lotuses, pillars, fountains, darkness and light. She saw and resolved strands of karma from past lives, and went through a series of mystical visions and initiation experiences with other monks and Buddhist saints. She believes this type of kensho needs much explanation and documentation because almost nothing is written of it, and that it is in no way exclusive to her. Almost anyone who trains seriously, and who not only tries to live by Buddhist precepts but cleans up the negative patterns of both present and past lives can experience this kensho. Regarding the phenomena that arise in meditation, called *makyo* by Buddhists, she said:

> It has been taught in the West that all experiences, visual or otherwise, during meditation, should be regarded as makyo and taken no notice of whatsoever.

> Whether this is true for all who have not had a first kensho, it is not necessarily true for those who have the little flashes of what I here call the On-Going Fugen kensho and not true at all for those having the third kensho. The Zen masters of old did not talk about the valid experiences, however, for fear that new trainees would mistake makyo for the real thing.[25]

The important task is to observe and learn from these experiences, without becoming attached to them. She describes enlightenment as an on-going experience which brings numerous kensho experiences, which may or may not include visions. Visions make no difference to the depth of the enlightenment experience. She suspects most people who have led spiritually focused lives will go through the type of visual experience she describes in her book during their final illness and shortly before their death. But the Zen master has learned to meditate properly and overcome fear of death so is able to go intensely into training and meditation to achieve this experience without having to die.[26] This belief is well-supported by literature related to near-death and dying experiences recorded by researchers, which reveal that people frequently see deceased relatives and friends, deities, the whole of their lives, and beautiful scenery that draws them in, during the process of dying.

Indian Guru Swami Muktananda has described both fearful and blissful visions in his autobiography, and states that he traveled to many worlds, meeting spirits, saints and sages. He realized they were different planes of existence too subtle to be seen with the normal eyes.[27]

The vision of the blue pearl is the most significant vision a yogi can attain, according to Muktananda. It is the divine light of consciousness which swells within everyone, or the actual form of the Self, the form of God which lives within us. He said this vision puts an end to bondage, and makes the yogi realize perfection.

Visions may also occur unexpectedly, and their presence seem out of context to the avowed spiritual beliefs of the recipient. Da Free John describes this event in the garden of Muktananda's ashram in India:

> I had been pulling weeds for perhaps half an hour when suddenly I felt a familiar Presence, as if a friend was standing behind me. I stood up and looked behind my shoulder. Standing in the garden, with an obviously discernible form, made of subtle energy but without any kind of visibility, was the Virgin, Mary, Mother of Christ.[28]

His first impulse was laughter, as he had spent years of total non-sympathy for Christianity, and had no attraction toward Catholic symbols. He had thought "the Virgin" was only a religious symbol, a secondary creation of the church. Yet he felt compelled to honor her presence, and he found himself growing in love and devotion as she continued to meet with him.

Free John spent several days chanting the "Hail Mary" as a mantra and then she appeared and showed him the image of Christ's face. "It appeared visibly in my heart, and she seemed only to uncover it. That image and the feelings it awakened in me seemed to me to have been hidden and suppressed there since my childhood. I was in love with Christ!"

"As these experiences increased I began to resist them mightily. I thought I must be deluded, I tried to meditate in the usual way, but always Mary and Christ would appear to guide and instruct me." [29]

Ultimately he was told to leave the ashram and go on a pilgrimage to the Christian holy places, which he did. He came to feel that this experience was a manifestation of the Kundalini shakti working independently in him, and that this indicated he was no longer dependent on the presence of his teacher, Muktananda, or the ashram in order to have experiences with the shakti.

In addition to images of deities and guides, dreams and visions of destruction are quite common during times of psychic upheaval and change. These may follow themes of personal destruction, such as dismemberment, torture or death; or of world destruction in the form of earthquakes, nuclear war, and other cataclysmic events. Jungian psychiatrist John Weir Perry wrote that "when a transformation of one's inner culture is under way, dissolution of the world image is the harbinger of change."

> The energy that had been bound up in the structures of the old self-image and world image, in the issues of who one is and what sort of world one lives in, is immense. In dreams or visions, nuclear explosion is a frequent expression of this enormous charge of psychic energy that is loose during a renewal process and raises havoc for a period of time, though one's own nature is struggling to break through one may feel that who one is and what one values is up for grabs.[30]

Perry, a pioneer in using innovative approaches with psychotic processes, believes these images indicate a crisis which may keep one in a state of fear until resolved. People can feel isolated because communication about what is happening to them is often misunderstood by professionals, who want to suppress the process and make one conform to the ways of the former self and the world. He sees this fear, and an accompanying rage, as producing the biochemical effects to the brain that many doctors see as indicative of a biochemical problem. He feels this conclusion is insupportable because people who receive love, understanding and encouragement recover from spiritual crisis without the need for suppressive drugs.

Experiences of Light

> One night I felt the energy rise to my neck, closed my eyes and looked inward, and I saw golden energy swirling incessantly around my organs. It seemed to move with determination and intelligence around each organ, as if familiar with my anatomy, bathing me in a glistening sheen....Beth.

> Sometimes I wake up at night with little flashing bolts of lights in my head, which feel expanded beyond my skull...or there is a glow slightly beginning above me which

> penetrates into my head that is a subtle white or slightly goldish color.... Jay.

> I see different colored lights when meditating. When my state of being shifts I may see flashes of color, as if there is a dark sky with pinholes through which luminescent blue and purple come through and grow a bit. At times the world looks luminous.... Rob.

Experiences of light are commonly reported by mystics during extremely heightened states of consciousness, but also occur in lessor degree to meditators, and spontaneously to those in Kundalini processes. A variety of light phenomena are associated with various stages of meditation in yoga, but meditators are usually advised by teachers to pay little attention to them. They are not indicative of "enlightenment" despite the fact they seem to be major experiences, often convincing people for the first time of another level of awareness beyond the customary parameters of their minds.

Red, white, blue, green, or a mixture of colors may appear; these colors are "tanmatric" lights. The tanmatras are subtle elemental energies from which derive the senses (sound, touch, sight, taste, smell) and the five elements (ether, air, fire, water, earth). They are associated with the spectrum of colors perceived in certain depths of awareness.

Four lights of red, white, black and blue are identified in scriptures, according to Muktananda, who said they have specific sizes (physical body, thumb, finger-tip and lentil-size respectively). He identified them as representations of our four bodies (the gross, subtle, causal and supracausal, further outlined in chapter three) and the four states of consciousness (waking, dream, deep sleep and transcendent). The sequence of visions of these lights indicates different stages of the spiritual journey.[31]

Aurobindo has stated that the appearance of fire, lights (either in masses or in symbolic forms), flowers, sun and moon symbols are commonly seen by most people who follow spiritual practices, and he believed they indicated the movement or action of inner forces. He said that sparks or movements of light indicated the play of forces in or around consciousness, and fire indicated a dynamic action. He said the mind did not necessarily have to be quiet or concentrated in order to see lights, as it depended only on the opening of the subtle vision of the sixth chakra. He associated various colors with a variety of forces, saying that when the light appeared outside of the person it indicated the touch or influence of an external force, and when it occurred internally it meant that power had penetrated, and was frequently active in the individual's nature.

Although he stated the symbolism of color was extremely complex, he did identify some colors with specific forces. He described golden light as always representing divine truth, and a certain shade of blue as indicating spiritual force. Yellow indicates the mind is growing brighter, reaching toward the golden light of truth. Orange or red-gold is generally the light of the higher forces as they are present in the physical being, but orange is also the color of occult knowledge, and crimson indicates the light of love in the physical body. (Paradoxically, orange-red is also commonly associated with muladhara, the base chakra). Various greens may be associated with a strong action of the life-force, work and action, emotional generosity, activity with abundant vital energy behind it, or strong health. Violet light represents divine compassion, or the inflowing of divine grace, while purple is the color of vital powers, and lavender-blue may represent the intuitive mind. White light indicates the divine consciousness, and may also indicate a force of purity.

Aurobindo also described images of the sun as symbolic of the concentrated light of truth, perceived directly. A red sun indicates that "true, illumined physical consciousness will replace the obscure and ignorant physical consciousness in which people ordinarily live". The moon may indicate spiritual consciousness, or suggest the flow of bliss. Visions of stars represent the promise of a light or creation in consciousness which is yet to come. Waves of colors represent a dynamic rush of forces into awareness. Visions of the dawn always mean an opening of some kind -- something not yet fully present to consciousness, and the night symbolizes ignorance.[32]

Aurobindo also called light a transformative element of consciousness, indicating that one who has quieted the mind and heart, life and body, can become open to an inwardly visible downward flow of light that stimulates the luminous inner force of transformation. He called this force the illumined Mind, where the clarity of spiritual intelligence is superseded by an intense splendor and illumination of the spirit that brings with it a "fiery ardor of realization and a rapturous ecstasy of knowledge."

There are few expositions in yogic literature on color and symbol as specific and detailed as those of Aurobindo's, although classical yogic and Christian scriptures are ripe with the abundance of light symbols and images when describing ecstatic experiences. Ralph Metzner, writing in Opening to Inner Light (1986), found these descriptions so profuse in the literature that he stated "The basic feature of the experience of enlightenment appears to be a sensing, feeling and knowing that one's body, heart and mind are being infused, usually from 'above' with inner light of a spiritual nature."[33]

Psychic Phenomena & Yogic Powers

> Walking on the beach at night I saw a crow pass over the moon, flying rapidly, about 60 miles per hour. I wanted a photo of it and focused my mental energy on communicating with it. It came back and hovered with wings outstretched before the moon, leaving immediately after the picture was shot... Rob.

> I see and hear entities when working with clients, and they give me advice about healing them. Once I smelled a Havana cigar while meditating, and looked up to see a big, craggy Englishman. He dictated some information for his wife, who was a friend of a house guest of mine, although I did not know at the time she was a widow. It made no sense to me, but she knew exactly what I was talking about... Sarah.

A final category of information often related to Kundalini is the powers associated with it such as precognitive and other psychic abilities, expanded creativity, heightened intelligence, healing, abilities to read and influence the minds of others, the ability of consciousness to leave the body, channeling other-dimensional beings and similar paranormal experiences. Some yogis have been observed to walk on nails, water or fire, or live underground with no air or food for extended periods of time. (This does not indicate spiritual advancement, only mastery of concentration and certain senses; many Westerners have mastered fire-walking in recent years.) Sai Baba, a modern Indian guru, is said by many to have the power to materialize objects. Several masters reportedly could transfer their bodies from one place to another, or be seen in two distant places simultaneously. (This shows mastery of subtle body energies.)

Although there are tantric yoga sects that emphasize the development of powers in the yogic tradition, most of the literature does not emphasize it, and often warns that the desire for power or preoccupation with it, divert one from the true purpose of the spiritual path, union with God. Anandamurti said the pursuit of occult powers prevents the possibility of cosmic consciousness, as the one is an outward path, and the other pulls one inward. He called occult power transitory and ordinary. He said "The general public does not possess that ordinary power, that's why they think it is a supernatural power. Gold is also an ordinary metal, but because it is a bit rare, that's why it is costly....It's just like that....There is nothing supernatural in this world -- everything is natural. "[34]

Paranormal Experiences Reported After Kundalini Awakening:

Psychic awareness.
Precognitive visions or intuition.
Seeing or feeling auras.
Synchronistic events.
The ability to do hands-on healing.
The ability to use one's energy to balance disturbed energy fields in others.
Spontaneous remembrance of past lives.
Increased comprehension of spiritual scriptures.
Feeling the ability to influence others.

Channeling poetry, art, books and other information (a process which seems to bring information independently of the intellect, as if from an outside entity).
Instinctive intuitive awareness of what one needs to do.
Feeling aware of the presence of a light being or teacher from another dimension.
Psychokinetic experiences (disturbing electrical or battery-operated appliances, or having objects move, crack or break near them.)
Out-of-body experiences.
An expanded vision of reality.

In addition to these unconventional activities (which, incidentally, also occur on occasion without Kundalini awakening) many people report awakened creativity, and begin to write or produce art, at least as a temporary stage of the process. This serves a healing and integrative function in their lives. Aurobindo correlated a great outburst of creative expression with the "luminous consciousness" which occurs in spiritual awakening.

Some people have occult powers without other indicators of spiritual awareness, perhaps as natural gifts brought in at birth, or learned in classes with teachers who had mastered a particular specialty, such as healing, or engaging in out-of-body experiences. These probably indicate particular chakras which are more highly charged than in people with more ordinary capacities. It is possible some people with such abilities have stronger awareness of pranic energy and can direct it more readily than others. Many who develop these conditions or abilities while in a spiritual process feel they are gifts that should be used to create health or well-being for others.

Most likely the dangers are not so much in using the occult, as in becoming fascinated by it or attached to it to the detriment of further spiritual development, and using it to accomplish egoic goals, which can lead to abuse of power. There are numerous stories in India of persons with occult powers using them for manipulation, revenge, personal power and other preoccupations of the lower-chakra energies. When such powers are used for the wrong purposes, lifetimes of negative karma may result. The challenge of the occult for one who wishes to become enlightened is to keep it in a perspective similar to that of other innate abilities or talents we possess as humans: that is, using it without attachment, for purposes which are not self-serving, and being willing to surrender it along with other egoic positions in order to attain greater depths of spiritual awareness.

The Samadhi Experience

> All I wanted was to merge and have no separate identity -- having a separate identity was painful. I had a desperate feeling for unity which wouldn't end.... Nan.

> During samadhi her face lost all freshness of life; the body appeared to be very frail and weak and in her general appearance there was no expression whatever of either joy or pain...she said "It is a state beyond all conscious and supra-conscious planes -- a state of complete immobilization of all thoughts, emotions and activities, both physical and mental -- a state that transcends all the phases of life here below".... Sri Anandamayi Ma. (Bhaiji)[35]

In the classical yogic literature Kundalini is primarily correlated with samadhi or enlightenment experiences. The yogi Keshavadas wrote "Samadhi is the aim of all yogas. This is a superconscious state where the soul is united with God. By attaining that universal consciousness, all doubts are dispelled, karma extinguished, and bliss and eternal peace are experienced". [36]

This spiritual awakening has also been described as the perception of the Self. According to the ancient Svetasvataropanisad (translated by Tyagisananda):

> As oil in sesame seeds, as butter in curds, as water in underground springs, as fire in wood, even so this Self is perceived in the self. He who, by means of truthfulness, self-control and concentration, looks again and again for the Self, which is all-pervading like

> butter contained in milk, which is rooted in self-knowledge and meditation, he becomes that Supreme Brahman, the destroyer of ignorance.[37]

Another swami, Madhusudandasji, wrote:

> When the Kundalini is aroused (one) progresses very rapidly on the path of spiritual evolution. He realizes the full potential of body and mind, attains inner peace, harmony and integration, and ultimately experiences the sublime truth of unity in diversity -- the fact that all life is one seamless fabric.[38]

There are various levels of the samadhi experience, and variations in the scriptures regarding the numbers of them and their names. According to the Yoga Sutras, while in the first level, called collectively stages of Sabija Samadhi, one investigates and masters knowledge about ordinary objects, sense perceptions, reasoning and awareness regarding gross and subtle bodies. Under this category are four stages of Samprajnata Samadhi, successive levels of realization, that must be practiced before it is possible to experience the two kinds of Nirbija Samadhi, the more advanced levels. Concentration and meditative practices lead to their experience.

In (1) Savitarka and (2) Nirvitarka Samadhis, one recognizes the true nature of a gross object, directly perceiving the five elements that comprise it, and releases attraction to it. Savitarka is the recognition with deliberation, Nirvitarka, without, (one is merged with the object, and has cast away all knowledge of it). Certain concentration practices that emphasize focusing on an object until one is merged with it support the development of this level of samadhi experience. People experiencing these states may report feeling merged with a candle, tree, or rock, with another person, or with a wide expanse of nature. As these kinds of experiences occur people lose attachment to the thoughts that bind them to body-consciousness and become more able to perceive they are not their physical bodies. These are impressions reported during Kundalini processes, and are believed by some yogis to correspond to the movement of Kundalini from the base to the throat chakra. It is also probable that many people who have these experiences as a result of intense concentration have not yet awakened Kundalini. Some schools of yoga call these concentration experiences and not samadhi states.

In (3) Savichara and (4) Nirvichara Samadhis the mind penetrates into a deeper state and the nature of subtle objects is recognized as one maintains an unbroken absorption. This is a leap in consciousness, and one now. perceives a reality beyond ordinary reality. These may include experiences of one's own subtle body, or visions of the subtle body or energy fields of other people or objects. They are states possible for one who has awakened Kundalini, particularly as it moves through the sixth and seventh chakras. In this stage one may experience oneself as the subtle body, have access to subtle body memories of other lives, have extrasensory awareness, and feel various kinds of bliss. associated with the dissolution of identification with what yogis call the tanmatras, or subtle elements that control the senses. The nature of space and time is revealed, and life is seen as a play of forces. At the level of Nirvichara Samadhi all conditions become undifferentiated, attraction to pleasure and pain fall away, and the illusions of life are pierced.

The ability to experience additional stages of (5) Sa-ananda and (6) Sa-asmita Samadhis follow. The distinguishing characteristics of these samadhis are the experiences of various intensities of bliss. Egoic and intellectual awareness dissolve as one merges into these states. Some yogis say it is the dissolution of those energies which create egoic consciousness that causes the intense blissful stages, and it is easy to linger in this stage of Samadhi because it is intensely pleasurable, and gives an illusion of completion. All existence becomes ecstatic bliss. The workings of intellect and its role in creating the material world are perceived in this stage. In Sa-amsita, the ego is cast away and one realizes "I am that I am", awareness beyond the ego. The "I" who is receiving the bliss (and all of manifestation) is realized as an illusion, as unreal in and of itself, but as a reflection of the impulses of cosmic reality. Some scriptures indicate that those who try to stay in this state will eventually lose it, unless they move on to more expanded stages of knowledge.

Complete union with God, cosmic awareness and freedom from all karma are associated with the deepest levels, which are called Nirbija states and are experiences beyond the Kundalini experience, usually associated with levels of consciousness beyond the sahasrara, or crown chakra. According to the scriptures of Samkya Yoga the levels of Samadhi at these states are (7) Asamprajnata, a samadhi of superconsciousness without conscious awareness; (8) Dharma Megha, described by Taimini in The Science of Yoga. as "the final Samadhi in which the yogi shakes himself free from the world of dharmas (properties, characteristics or functions) which obscure reality like a cloud", and the stage in which the cycle of one's individuality is finished, karma is finished, and complete and irreversible Self-realization occurs; and finally, (9) Kaivalya, or perfect liberation, (also known as Sahaj Samadhi or Nirvikalpa Samadhi), a stage of supreme experience and infinite knowledge even the Sutras do not attempt to describe. This transcendental state is beyond awareness of gross or subtle bodies, beyond duality, time, space or causality, and it brings the end of all desire for the material world.

Taimini wrote that one cannot imagine this state in which the light of consciousness illuminates itself, but the student should not make the mistake of thinking of it as becoming immersed in a sea of nebulous bliss and knowledge. “Each successive stage of unfolding of consciousness increases tremendously its vividness and clarity, and brings an added influx of knowledge and power. It is absurd to suppose therefore that in the last stage which marks the climax of this unfolding, consciousness lapses suddenly into a vague and nebulous state."[39]

Some spiritual teachers, however, do not describe this awareness as the final goal of the journey, but only a stage itself of the ever-expanding potential of consciousness. In some traditions the capacity to move spiritual energy from other dimensions into the human plane, and thus bring the Divine into every aspect of the human condition, are later stages which follow liberation.

The ending of karma is an appealing concept to many who believe in reincarnation, implying complete freedom of choice regarding incarnation thereafter. Karma represents the entanglement of the ego and the personality on the wheel of causality, the patterns of cause and effect, and the personality tendencies and attachments that govern one's life. The karmic patterns we bring with us at birth are believed in some traditions to be predetermined from experiences and choices in past lives, and by others to be obtained from what might be thought of as a collective karmic pool, through which the soul either chooses or is burdened with certain traits and tasks on its way into life. Either way all beings are called upon to experience this karma and create positive karma through their thoughts and actions during their lifetimes. How can samadhi free one from this process?

It is not a magical experience, like redemption or a blessing that comes unearned. It is instead the reasonable consequence of seeing clearly who one is, of reuniting with the primary unitive consciousness of the universe and releasing all attachment to the body-mind identity, even forgetting it, and existing completely in the moment. It is not an idea, nor an understanding of who one is, and has nothing to do with the intellect. It must be a direct experience, a complete letting go. Even so, having this experience momentarily, in snatches of blissful contemplation, does not automatically free one from karma. One must live it and die in this state of non-attachment. There must be no trace of identity or desire to hook one's consciousness during the dying process.

In the yogic tradition, Kundalini is the Self which is aware of its divinity, of its primary relationship and union with the creation in its state of formlessness. This state is composed of *sat-chit-ananda* -- being, consciousness and bliss. Kundalini awakening is essential if one is to know higher levels of samadhi. But preliminary experiences, often identified as samadhi or satori (in the Zen tradition) give hints of this later condition, motivate one on the path toward the final goal, and prepare the mind for what is to come. These begin with experiences of loss of self-awareness, absorption with objects, experiences of unity, merging into light or energy phenomena, connections with the archetypal energies through voices or visions that seem to translate messages from other planes of existence into human consciousness, and other altered states. These experiences are stepping-stones toward an ultimate awakening or surrender. They are flashes of Self-experiences, widening consciousness, enabling one to integrate a piece at a time the concept of letting go of personal identity, tempting one to reunite with a primary state of beingness, consciousness and bliss.

The more one has of these "smaller" samadhis, the greater one's sense of acceptance of life and death as they are, and the smaller the attachment to ego goals. It is these flashes of insight into the nature of ego-death and the vastness of universal consciousness that trigger personality changes (and anxiety) in many who have meditated or used drugs. One cannot stay so attached to ego-goals after grasping even small aspects of this truth. The psyche begins to rearrange itself! But in order to complete the spiritual journey it is essential to resist identifying these experiences as attainment or enlightenment, and to surrender each experience for the next, neither clinging to it nor attaching oneself at any step of the journey.

People who have awakened Kundalini universally have this awareness and report occasional glimpses of this perspective of consciousness. Many find themselves drawn more and more toward a desire to know unitive consciousness. It may not feel at all like an intellectual choice or decision, but feels more like an inner compulsion. It is possible to have awakened Kundalini and only experience samadhi; and it is possible to have some kinds of samadhi-like experiences, such as feeling merged with an object of contemplation, or feeling a powerful surge of union in looking at a beautiful sunset, without having awakened Kundalini. I believe people who have intensive and repeated high-level samadhi experiences through disciplined spiritual practices have undoubtedly awakened Kundalini, even if they do not show any of the other physical or emotional conditions related to it.

Vedantic and yogic scriptures tell us that in ancient times deeper level samadhi experiences were the more common path to spiritual consciousness, and it was not until the Kali Yuga (the age of Iron or materialism) that physical methods of awakening and experiencing this energy (such as Hatha Yoga, tantra, and pranayama) had to be employed. They were developed to help sensual races of people awaken their bodies in preparation for spiritual awareness. It is more challenging in this age for individuals to release physical, emotional and intellectual attachments and identifications.

People who are experiencing Kundalini awakening can integrate and focus their process by understanding and seeking samadhi experiences, and opening to Kundalini as a spiritual guide, giving it attention and respect. Without this, they will probably not feel the inherent bliss and ecstasy that the process potentially holds. If they can identify themselves as spiritual seekers, value the energy as the awakening of the Self, and follow spiritual practices consistently it seems inevitable that the process will become more smooth and more integrated over a period of time. Krishnamurti wrote in the later years of his life of an ecstasy that never left him. "I am full of something tremendous. I can't tell you in words what is like a bubbling joy, a living silence, an intense awareness like a living flame." [40] This is an outcome of samadhi.

Commentary on the Symptoms

There are clearly many patterns of experiences related to Kundalini awakening. But it is nevertheless difficult to diagnose, because many of these "symptoms" are not exclusive to the Kundalini process. Many people have demonstrated psychic, intellectual or creative abilities without spiritual awakening, and many more have exhibited any or all of the physical and mental symptoms, such as heat flashes, shaking, eating irregularities and seeing lights or visual phenomena. These happenings may occur in anyone because of stress, mental or physical illness, or in response to meditation, unusual brain stimulation or to other circumstances of ordinary life. This makes it difficult to correlate them specifically with Kundalini awakening.

However, when many of these conditions occur together in someone with no previous indicators of serious mental illness or physical disability, when the conditions were precipitated by a dramatic movement of energy such as described in yogic definitions of Kundalini awakening, and when the experiences fall in several of the categories identified, they indicate a high probability of Kundalini awakening, particularly if there is evidence of samadhi or increased spiritual awareness. Since this energy cannot yet be mechanically measured, and is generally unfamiliar to western science, it cannot be scientifically defined and determined. Until more studies of probable Kundalini subjects are available there will not be an adequate data base for understanding this phenomenon in the West.

In the meantime, there are more and more published accounts available by spiritual teachers, mystics, and others which tell of the depth and power of personal encounters with Kundalini. These indicate both the similarities and the uniqueness of each individual experience. Like refracted rays of light, each story is a reflection from a single source, yet has its own characteristic dimensions and qualities. Because western theologians and scientists have so dogmatically separated religious experience from scientific inquiry both schools have failed to grasp the implications of discovering correlates between heightened physical energies and the human potential for spiritual emergence and creative transformation.

CHAPTER THREE

YOGIC VIEWS OF ENERGY, THE BODY AND THE SELF

Those who awaken Kundalini sometimes see images representing the movement of energy in their bodies that seem to them like a chart mapping the internal path that Kundalini follows. These usually show an upward movement through the spine, the awakening of various chakras, the condition of body organs, and/or variations of colored lights. Often they see the energy reach beyond the physical body and into astral dimensions they find indescribable.

> When I closed my eyes and peeped inward, I found that the whole backbone was hallowed inside and was clearly visible. There was a red string passing through it and joining the base of the spine with the Brahmarandhra (in the crown), and in place of the cobra which was emerging out of the Brahmarandhra....there was an engaging figure of the blue Lord Krishna... B.S. Goel[1]

> While I was doing shoshuten (a Taoist practice of circulating energy in the upper part of the body), I could see the inside of the sushumna, the sahasrara and two or three other chakras shining. After I had practiced yoga for six months or a year, a shining golden light began to enter and leave my body through the top of my head and I felt as if the top of my head protruded ten to twenty centimeters, in the astral, but of the physical dimension. I saw what looked like the head of Buddha, shimmering purple and blue, resting on the top of my own head. There was a golden-white light flowing in and out through the gate on top of the Buddha's crown.
> Motoyama[2]

According to Vedic scriptures Kundalini energy is the fundamental power of creation and the primary consciousness of the universe. Swami Vishnu Tirtha described it in a classic volume, Kundalini, Devatma Shakti, as a universal cosmic energy/consciousness which manifests from the all-pervasive Brahman. This energy appears in the dynamic state while creating and after completing the process in hand it conceals itself by becoming a static residual energy in the center of an individual being. Here it is coiled, until it is awakened and reverses its path back to the source.[3]

In the dynamic process of creating human life, according to the Vedas, the life force goes through a specific process of creating three bodies: the causal body (containing bliss and consciousness), the subtle body (containing potentiality for mind, ego, energy, emotion and senses) and the gross body (the material or physical body). Once this force has put into matter the patterns of personality, intellect and physiology, the residual energy coils into a point at the base of the spine (identified as the muladhara by eastern Indians). When Kundalini awakens, the coiled energy is believed to raise like a serpent from the base, transforming the natures of the six chakras in its path, and ultimately moving through the crown of the head into sahasrara chakra. This makes possible the experience of God-realization or enlightenment.[4]

Some yogis describe her energy as moving gradually up the spine and triggering specific capacities, knowledge and samadhi experiences as each chakra is fully enlivened. It appears that chakras generally operate to maintain balance and energy distribution in an individual until Kundalini awakens. As their energy is accelerated the chakras undergo significant changes, and when the psyche responds to these impulses the result may be personality changes, paranormal abilities and "enlightenment" experiences.

In some people Kundalini energy initially springs up suddenly and erratically, like blasts of a geyser, causing glimpses of awareness, snatches of bliss and disruption of physical and psychic processes. In others there is a sudden solid streaming of energy through the body which lasts a few minutes (or longer), after which experiences of energy, vision, sounds, and awareness occur periodically, and an ever-increasing vibration, which feels like a hum in the body, is permanently established. Others experience her as a fine and steady stream coming only during meditation, bringing samadhi and bliss. Some experience only subtle shifts in energy and primarily feel shifts in consciousness, while others experience massive and continuous movements of energy or burning sensations, and many other difficult conditions.

Kundalini is nurtured and enhanced by spiritual practices (especially meditation), healthy physical habits, respect and devotion toward the divine, physical exercises, and certain body therapies. Although some yogis believe the energy cannot become dormant once it is awakened; others advise that it must be invited daily through spiritual practices until permanent realization occurs, which happens after the piercing of the seventh chakra.

Swami Muktananda emphasized that Kundalini is always active in the body, holding the system in stasis and maintaining the energy balance, and that it is the "inner" aspect of awakening her that triggers the true beginning of the spiritual journey.

This differentiation is useful in understanding some of the contradictory writings about Kundalini. Most yogis identify the true movement of Kundalini as the awakening of consciousness or Self, implying a "knowing" other than intellectual knowing about life, a knowing which in itself triggers transformation. Although Kundalini may be working in the body, and even generating body movements and psychic disturbances through highly charged pranic activity, until there is a shift in consciousness, one has not really activated this "inner" aspect of spiritual awakening.

The Yoga of Light, a translation of the ancient Hatha Yoga Pradipika, interprets the Sanscrit text definition of Kundalini as:

> The latent force of higher potential, said to lie in three and one-half coils, like the snake in the churning of the ocean of milk, sleeping at the lowest center (muladhara chakra) at the foot of the 'tree of life', the spinal column. This serpent power, Kundalini, cannot be described fully, even by one who has succeeded in awakening it. When it awakens, it shoots through the body like an electric shock, and, trembling and amazed, the person realizes that a powerful event has taken place within him. This is only the beginning. The whole body trembles. A door seems to have been pushed open through which a flood of light flows from some unknown world, a light of incomparable radiance. After a long time the trembling body becomes calm, but the flash of light shooting through the spinal column to the crown of the head is unforgettable. This flash of light is not really the Kundalini, however, it is merely a sign of its awakening. The Kundalini itself does not shoot up, but will later rise slowly, passing through the stations (the chakras), each of which creates another new and powerful experience.[5]

Here again we find a differentiation between a physical opening, and a movement of consciousness, which reportedly follows more slowly in one who awakens the energy.

Swami Narayanananda quoted his teacher, Swami Vivekananda, as saying that when the coiled up energy of Kundalini is aroused and enters the canal of the sushumna (within the spinal column), its action upon the chakras causes a tremendous reaction, immensely superior to the reaction of dream or imagination, more intense than sense perceptions. "And when it reaches the metropolis of all sensations, the brain, the whole brain, as it were, reacts, and the result is the full blaze of illumination, the perception of the Self." As the force moves through the chakras it opens up "layer after layer of the mind. . . and this universe is perceived by the yogi in its fine or causal form. Then alone the causes of this universe both as sensation and reaction are known as they are, and hence comes all knowledge."[6]

Narayanananda also described a partial arising of Kundalini, occurring often during deep devotional songs and dancing, when emotions are very high. At these times it does not rise up fully, but a sudden partial rising will cause devotees to weep, sing, dance and be carried away by a sudden outburst of feeling. The danger of this is that if it comes down again suddenly to the sexual center (svadhisthana chakra), it may trigger "abnormal" sexual drives and cravings. (He did not define what he meant by "abnormal".) He cited this as a reason that some devotees who have not developed the purity of strong will become immoral, even though they hold positive spiritual intentions. He said one-pointed study and concentration can also trigger a partial uprising, which leads one not to emancipation but toward inspiration in art, poetry, literature, science or research.[7]

Prana: Energy of the Life Force

The term "prana" is used by some scholars interchangeably with "Kundalini" but this is correct only in the most general sense, as Kundalini is sometimes referred to in a cosmic form as all energies in the universe, being the life force or the source of all existence. Prana is an electrical-like energy flow in the body, which is more gross and more accessible than Kundalini, and in fact, keeps the entire system in working order even while Kundalini lies asleep or dormant at the base of the spine. It could be considered a stepped-down vibration of the more powerful Kundalini force. "Prana" is the creative and active energy that flows in the body and operates it functionally and directionally. It links consciousness with the entire operating system. "Kundalini" is the dormant residual of this energy that lies coiled in the muladhara. Descriptions of "*chi*" or "*ki*" in Oriental medicine are more akin to the concept of "prana" in the yogic tradition than to Kundalini

In the Chinese system *chi* is described as the life force, present in two primary forces, yang and yin, which are polarities reflecting opposite states in continual interchange. Their interaction determines the nature of the universe and is manifest as the five essential elements which make up all things. According to traditional Chinese medicine *chi* flows throughout the body and 12 body meridians (or channels of energy flow) in specific patterns and directions, and when this energy flow is upset or out of balance, physical and emotional problems may occur. In Ayurveda, the classical Indian medicine system, the correct balancing of prana is similarly important. Acupuncture and acupressure are among Chinese methods for balancing this energy, and yoga asana (postures) and breathing practices are among the Indian methods.

According to the yogic guru and teacher Baba Hari Dass, body jerks, vibrations and other movements sometimes identified as "Kundalini" are the reactions of prana as it moves through the system. It appears such activity is intensified in some people after Kundalini awakens, particularly if they have not adequately prepared their energy system with proper purifications, involving cleansing processes, breathing exercises and diet.

Other explanations that have been proposed regarding this intensified kriya activity suggest that there are physical and psychological blocks, armoring, or holding in the body which prevent the direct flow of energy; that what is occurring is a mechanism of stress release; and that the sushumna or central channel through which the energy flows is not large enough to accommodate the intense energy. It is also known that disruptions of energy flow to the brain may cause body jerks and spasms as may electrical brain stimulation in laboratories. I have observed in therapeutic sessions that people who are very emotionally blocked and unable to express feelings, as well as people who are engaged in powerful cathartic releases, may demonstrate intense kriya activity, especially if their Kundalini energy is awakened.

Prana is a term for three levels of activity -- 1) it refers to the life-force or the total of all energy residing within the universe; 2) it is a term for the energy inherent in biological functions; and 3) it is the breath. It is the vital force or biological energy linking material or physical energy to mental energy, connecting the gross and the subtle bodies. According to Singh "It is not like a physical energy but is a subtle biological energy which catches the vibrations of the mind and transmits them to the nerves and plexuses and also (carries) physical vibrations to the mind. By controlling the mind one can control the prana and by controlling the prana, one can control the mind." Singh states that prana cannot be contacted or influenced directly, but only through the breath. Usually "prana" refers to the exhaled breath, suggestive of the manifestation of the world, and "apana" to the inhaled breath indicating the withdrawal back to the source.[8]

Yogis use breathing practices to control the prana which flows through subtle body nerves, and to focus it at the root of the spinal cord in order to awaken Kundalini. This kind of control is also the source of many of the paranormal activities and abilities of advanced yogis.

The senses of perception and the organs of action perform through the influence of prana which separates into five aspects that fulfill various body functions: (1) prana, which works in the heart and draws air into the system; (2) apana, which draws downward and throws out of the system things that are not needed, such as waste matter and urine; (3) samana, which functions in all places with the task of distributing nourishment from the food we eat and digestion; (4) vyana, carrier of movement through the entire system and responsible for blood circulation; and (5) udana, which brings life-currents upwards to the heart and brain. In addition to the major divisions, there are five minor pranas. These perform the tasks of belching, opening eyelids, sneezing, yawning, and managing the gross body. Each is governed by five vayus or nerve impulses. Tirtha called prana a fine form of energy different from physical energy which is the motive force that keeps the living organism, in good working order.[9]

Prana operates the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, working both under volition and independently. It operates the mind and both physical and psychic bodies, and this is why through yogic breathing exercises the yogi can achieve mastery of mind and emotions. Some advanced yogis are also able to control autonomous motor systems such as the heart beat, pulse rate, and kidneys, and to change temperature in their bodies, making them hot or cold. When more prana is moved consciously into the mind it is reflected as consciousness and can be conserved and focused to use for highly creative work or occult purposes. According to Tirtha, if a yogi focuses prana subjectively as reflection on the inner self it leads to samadhi.

The relationship of prana and breath is significant to those who practice yoga and pranayama techniques, yogic breathing exercises designed to control and direct prana. Correct practice can help develop emotional control, a calm mind, the refinement of sense perceptions, and the elimination of selfish desires, preparing the mind for higher stages of yogic practice. Swami Radha says pranayama increases the alpha waves in the brain, brings the vagus nerves under control and provides a relaxing effect on the heart and nervous system. Long-term benefits include extrasensory perception and the burning up of karma.[10]

Pranayama is also practiced to stimulate the awakening of Kundalini energy. Prana vayu is generated by inhalation, affecting the afferent system and apana vayu is generated by exhalation, affecting the efferent system. By breath retention the yogi unites these two impulses at the muladhara, which creates a dynamic energy force to stimulate Kundalini. If successful, the awakened Kundalini is moved upwards through sushumna, the invisible nadi or nerve channel in the center of the spine.

The Siva Sutras claim that by stilling the prana through various means one may experience seven different kinds of bliss: the bliss of one's own self; transcendental bliss; supreme bliss; the bliss of the absolute; great bliss; the bliss of consciousness; and the bliss of the world.[11]

Activities such as spontaneous movements, waves of bliss, shaking or jerks of the body, sudden pains, hot and cold flashes, feelings of energy or numbness in the hands and feet, and other sensations are sometimes reported by meditators, people who do altered-state transpersonal work and those experiencing physical release. These are pranic activities, but not necessarily indicative of Kundalini awakening. Likewise, waves of emotions and psychic upheavals can occur without Kundalini energy, although all of these phenomena may indicate one is in states preparatory to, or preliminary to, the awakening process. A stronger and more conscious flow of pranic energy or *chi* is commonly felt by many who practice yoga, acupressure, Tai Chi, Aikido, meditation, and other processes in which there is focus on the breath and concentration.

"Shakti" or "Sakti" is another term sometimes used in eastern references to energy, prana or Kundalini. "Shakti" is a principle most commonly found in tantric Yoga. The word comes from the root *sak*, "to have power" or "to be able". It is the universal cosmic substance that is the source of creation, the active principle. Siva is the God representing pure consciousness (in a formless state), who resides in the cerebrum or sahasrara chakra, and Sakti, his consort, is the powerful feminine energy from which creation emerges. In humans, she resides at the base of the spine, where she is known as Kundalini. The two are inseparable.

Some schools of yoga, especially Siddha Yoga, identify "shaktipat" as a primary method of awakening Kundalini. This term refers to the energy transmitted from a guru to a follower, usually as part of an initiation, that stimulates the awakening. Some classical yogic texts suggest this is the only way Kundalini can be awakened, and if it should appear to happen spontaneously this is because of a relationship with a guru in a previous life. According to the teaching of Kashmir Shaivism, there are three classes of shaktipat (also identified as redemptive grace), sub-divided into nine minor sub-divisions, and the kind of experience one has with shaktipat indicates one's level of spiritual evolution. The most highly developed people experience the very rare experience of an intense shakti which instantaneously liberates them, even if they have never followed any spiritual practices. Moderate levels of shakti stimulate spiritual life, drawing people into spiritual practices, austerities, initiation, and ritual. Mild shakti induces a longing for meditation, spiritual knowledge, and detachment from worldly preoccupations.[12]

Baba Hari Dass has stated that one who is advanced by birth and has total faith in the teacher can attain enlightenment by shaktipat. He believes it is not the power of the guru but the power of one's own faith and samskaras (tendencies and conditions brought in from previous lives) that accomplishes this.

Subtle Body Theory & Kundalini

It is essential for the therapist, physician or bodyworker who wants to understand and work effectively with Kundalini energy to understand the spiritual-physical system that is the foundation of yogic theory, because it is apparent that Kundalini awakening is not a manifestation or process of the physical body as it is known through western medicine and biology. Westerners must overcome the cultural bias against recognizing the relationship of spirituality to the physical universe and the human body; yet this is paradoxically difficult because the subtle body system appears to defy attempts of western science to observe it conclusively with medical or scientific equipment yet developed. It can only be theorized from its effects on the physiology and psyche of those who experience it.

Yogic literature generally describes the life force as creating individuals through the manifestation of the previously identified three bodies -- the causal, the subtle and the gross, in which are contained five kosas, or sheaths, which form the human. The bodies link with one another through the chakras or energy vortices, five major and five minor pranic fields of energy, and from 72,000 to 720.000 nadis (subtle lines of directional force through which pranic energies move, the speculated number of which varies greatly in the literature). The nadis emanate from the muladhara, the root and support of the subtle body system, close to where the Kundalini energy lies coiled. They correspond generally to the channels of energy flow identified in the Taoist tradition, which are the basis of acupressure and acupuncture meridians, and also extend considerably beyond the physical body.

Being part of the subtle body, the five kosas or sheaths, the chakras and nadis also form the substance of the psychological and mental being, carrying through the system propensities from previous lives, inspirations, talents, desires and motivations which form the core of the individual's life direction and personality patterns.

The **causal** body is called in Sanscrit the anandamaya kosa, or bliss sheath. It contains the three energies of creation (gunas) in dormant form -- harmonious consciousness, (sattva); activity or the will to create (rajas); and inertia or matter (tamas). These are the qualities of prakriti (the active creative principle) that allow form to exist in matter. We cannot directly impact the nature of the causal body but as a person brings the mind and the senses under control by following the yamas (positive actions) and niyamas (avoidance of negative actions) of yoga, and performing purifications, breathing practices, and meditation techniques, these energies become more balanced. The particular mixture of energies varies with each individual and is said to be contained with the seed of the subtle body between lives. When one achieves liberation, sattva will dominate the energy field.

The **subtle** or **energy** body contains three sheaths: vijnanamaya kosa, containing potentiality of both intellect and ego; manomaya kosa, containing potentiality of the mind and sense organs; and pranamaya kosa, containing the vital energies.

The **gross** body is the annamaya kosha sheath, where the 24 subtle body energies are divided into mental faculties, sense organs, organs of action, ten pranas and five elements, all of which are used in the functioning of the human body.

In The Pancadasi, as interpreted by Mahadevan, the Atman (or soul-essence) is said to be hidden in the cavity of these five sheaths. This scripture describes the gross body sheath as born of the food assimilated by the parents, and sustained by food alone. The sheath of vital airs (pranamaya) is the vitalizer of the physical body, giving it strength, and activating various senses to perform their respective functions. The mental sheath is that which identifies itself with the body and considers itself to have possessions, relationships, etc. It is subject to changing passions and passing moods and desires. The sheath of intellect is a reflection of the Supreme Intelligence, but is dormant in sleep. On awakening, "it fills the body to the finger-tips...it is the doer of all deeds, possessing the power of cognition." Anandamaya, the sheath of enjoyment, represents the mind turned inward, which is a reflection of ananda or bliss. [13]

Anandamurti called the five sheaths or kosas "cells of the mind", and also linked them with the activities of the chakras, stating that a perfect spiritual practice is to identify each kosa completely with the Self. He said ajna chakra is the controller of the kosas and chakras, so as one develops ajna he/she gains increased control over the kosas, and thereby the mind and body organs become more docile and submissive, and less affected by external influences, vanity, inertness and superstition.[14]

In an ancient tantric text translated by Rama Prasad in 1889, the creation of the human through kosas is described as a microcosm of the formation of the planets and the universe through the constellation of the five various ethers. These are: (1) akasha, through which every form lives and comes to be and which brings the quality of space to give room for movement in creation; (2) tejas, which brings luminosity and color to form, enabling it to be seen through the reflection of light; (3) vayu, related to touch, moving in spherical motion, giving birth to and nourishing the skin, and creating locomotion; (4) apas, related to taste and bringing the quality of contraction so that various ethers move together, and of smoothness, allowing these atomic structures to glide over one another; and (5) prithivi, the ether related to smell, having the quality of cohesive resistance that creates bones.

It is notable that the vibration of each of these ethers follows a specific form, which is indicated symbolically by the circle, triangle, spiral, half moon and quadrangle, respectively. These symbols frequently emerge during altered states related to the Kundalini experience, and are also connected with the chakras. Prasad states that without these ethers or elements there is no adequate explanation of the phenomena of light, sound, touch, taste and smell in the human, and he describes them in various combinations as molecular structures.[15]

The knots or "granthis" (Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra or Shiva) are three aspects of subtle body theory often overlooked in treatises on this subject. They refer to places along the spinal column (in locations which vary considerably in the scriptures) where the energy-connection or identification with creation is especially strong and the energy must be pierced by certain yogic practices.

According to The Siva Sutras, the Brahmagranthi is the first point pierced by Kundalini before the muladhara chakra (at the base of the spine) is pierced; the Visnugranthi is pierced between manipura (at the abdomen) and anahata (at the heart) chakras; and Rudragranthi is pierced between the visuddha (at the throat) and the ajna chakra (between the eyes in the forehead). In yoga these represent three levels of consciousness, or stages of bondage which must be released. When piercing Brahmagranthi the physical level or the false identification with the body ends, releasing identification with physical, emotional and sensate interests. One becomes established in totality. Since this is the initial granthi to be pierced upon awakening of Kundalini, this action may carry the responsibility for the chaotic physical and emotional activities that occur in early stages of the process. When the Visnugranthi or mental knot is pierced one gains control of the subtle body, releasing identification with the mind, including desires and mental vacillations. One perceives the universal life principle. When the spiritual center or Rudragranthi is pierced ignorance is removed and the Self is attained, bringing a permanent sensation of bliss.

The Chakras

Chakras are the most commonly known elements of subtle body theory in the West, as many writers with interests in yoga, Tibetan Buddhism, Theosophy and psychic interests have provided varied descriptions and interpretations of them. Although seven stages of samadhi are referred to in the classical yoga sutras, developments of concepts about chakras probably did not emerge until tantric practices began. Some interpreters of eastern literature relate the piercing by Kundalini of the six major chakras, and its merging into the seventh, as analogous to these stages of samadhi, and report specific conditions which follow each stage. Others do not put much emphasis on chakras, and suggest that the basic yoga practices and disciplines can transform the chakra energies so that when Kundalini awakens they are of minor importance, but simply sustain the spiritual opening.

Often I have observed repeated kriyas (that is, shaking, jerking, twisting or vibrations) occurring in chakra areas in someone who is doing body therapy, or having emotional or physical stress. It appears as if there is a blockage so that energy is not moving through the body smoothly at that point. It is possible that unresolved issues or mental conditions related to the chakras cause such blockages. It is also possible that some of the physical problems associated with spontaneous Kundalini awakenings are due to the impact of Kundalini energy on chakras relevant to the affected body organs, as most chakras control the functioning of certain organs.

Other phenomena that may be associated with chakra energies are the spontaneous emergence of specific images, sounds, and symbols which the tantric cosmology has associated with each chakra. Their emergence during times of crisis may provide information pertinent to the kinds of issues one needs to resolve, or point to the area of the body where specific attention can most effectively be focused. For these reasons it is helpful to have some understanding of the chakra system. Since many books are available on this subject the following remarks provide only a slight overview.

Chakras have been called such things as neurohormonal mechanisms governing zones of the body (Mishra); centers of the body's energy system (Pandit); energy vortices; intermediaries which convey energy from one dimension into another; "interdimensional transducing systems capable of being directed by thought and converting matter into energy "(Joy); centers of subtle forces, cosmic consciousness and the generation of prana; and openings on the macrocosm.

As atoms are to the field of matter, so the "bindu" of the chakra is to the pranic energy field, according to Goswami, writing on Layayoga. He says "the motional or active state of pranic force concentrates and centralizes to form petaline bindus at various points of the body, termed by the yogis chakras or lotuses. This development begins with the sahasrara chakra, and develops progressively downward as the human consciousness and material body is formed. All this is invisible to the naked eye. Chakras function supramaterially."[16]

Generally chakras are considered the links between all the activities of the causal, subtle and gross bodies.

Vrittis (thought waves) emanate from them, as well as other energies which are distributed throughout the body. That is why specific emotions and characteristics have been ascribed to each of them. If we accept a view of chakras as the main transducers of energy between these bodies, it is understandable that the intensification of consciousness and energy associated with Kundalini awakening would put powerful extra stresses on the chakra system. Often they are described as lotuses which move from downward to upward positions as Kundalini rises through them. It is possible that this is symbolic of a gradual process, nowhere near as dramatic and rapid as the mind can imagine, and that much of the physical and emotional turmoil which some people experience with Kundalini is concurrent with the readjustment of the chakra which is changing to serve a different level of consciousness and energy than that to which the body was normally accustomed.

There are seven major chakras and 43 less significant ones, with many characteristics ascribed to them in a variety of texts. Prana is said to dominate in various chakras following a sixty-minute pattern throughout the day. Several kinds of symbols are associated with each of the major chakras. These include an animal, representing subtle forces which rule the chakra; a God, who signifies one of the divine forces of manifestation; and a Goddess, who demonstrates the kind of energy localized at this point. Other symbols indicate the dominant element and the sensate capacity connected with the chakra. Meditation on each chakra is said to awaken the energy of the respective Goddess contained there, who will lead one into a unique divine potential. The lotus petals represent various qualities, emotional tendencies and capacities. The following brief descriptions, provide information which may be relevant to those who are experiencing Kundalini, and are impacted by specific emotional problems, visions, sounds, occult responses and other events associated with the chakras.

Muladhara

Located almost at the bottom of the backbone, adjoining the anus and the testicles or cervix, this chakra is identified as a four-petaled lotus, with the petals representing supreme happiness, innate bliss, the bliss of union, and the bliss of bravery, strength or power. It is said to be a reflection on a gross level of the crown chakra, and this is why the petals carry bliss. The nature of this chakra is identical with Brahman, the creative principle of the universe. We might think of it as holding the body in its material form, thus forming creation; and that within its essence lies the primordial history and potentiality of human evolution. It is the foundation and support of the system, and its proper functioning is associated with issues of security and self-preservation, the element earth, the colors orange-red and the tanmatra (or sense) of smell. An elephant with a black strip around its neck is its symbol, standing for the terrestrial qualities of strength, firmness, balance and support, as does a yellow square contained within a circle in the yantra of this chakra. (The yantra is a geometric mandala symbolizing the meaning of the chakra.) It also holds a triangle, called tripura, representing will, knowledge and action.

The muladhara influences the rectum, kidneys, accumulation of sperm and the sexual organs, and also the bones, skin, flesh, nerves and hair. Specific physical conditions such as hemorrhoids, constipation, sciatica and prostate problems have been associated with it. It is connected to the sense of smell, and its vibrations bring about expansion and contraction of the lungs.

Mishra writes that anger, lust and greed are controlled by practicing pratyahara (the withdrawal of sense-awareness) on this chakra. Grief and depression have also been considered symptoms of imbalance. Meditation on it is also said to bring control of attachment to luxury, deception, pride, envy and selfishness. Pandit said the muladhara governs physical or subconscious movements or impulses. Within the yantra is a blood-red triangular zone of fire which blows kandarpa vayu which is the cause of sexual excitement, essential for procreation. Motoyama wrote that when this chakra awakens it releases repressed emotion in an explosive manner that may lead one to feel extremely irritable and psychologically unstable, follow erratic sleeping patterns, and become passionate, overly-talkative or easily enraged.

Meditating on the God at this chakra, the Sayambhulinga Mahadeva, who is seated with his face turned backwards, is said to free one from sins. Brahma, the God of absolute creative force, also empowers this chakra with the goddess Dakini Sakti, the energy of creation. Repeating a chant called the mula mantra, with a placid mind and devotion, while focusing here, is said to awaken her energy. In yogic cosmology Kundalini energy is coiled three and a half times just below this chakra. Here it is that yogis consider to be the confluence in the body of the sushumna (a nadi carrying life current); Vajra Nadi (a nadi carrying electric current) and Brahma Nadi (sound current or spirit current). This explains how it is that three specific practices can awaken Kundalini -- using the breath (life current) and controlling its flow through the sushumna; withdrawal of sense-awareness (pratyahara), which is a withdrawal of prana, and concentrating it at the base of the spine which would impact the electrical current; and recitation of mantra or repetition of certain sounds, impacting sound current. It also explains the interrelationship of several Kundalini symptoms -- experiencing of certain energies which feel electrical; pranic energy releases; and emission of certain spontaneous sounds.

Svadhisthana

Located a little above the muladhara and at the root of the genital organ, or in the center of the lumbar region, this chakra is associated with conquest of the element water, symbolized by a half-moon, and with the god Vishnu, the sustaining principle of the universe. Its color is usually identified as red or vermilion, sometimes as white. Rakini Sakti, in dark blue, with three red eyes, a bleeding nostril, and four arms, is the goddess who carries this energy. She holds a trident, lotus, drum and chisel. A light gray or green sea-monster which looks similar to a crocodile is the animal symbol, representing dominion over the sea, and indicating an association with the unconscious. Meditation on it is said to bring victory over the elements.

It has six petals which carry the mental conditions of neglect, insensitivity, credulity, suspicion, destructiveness and cruelty and also represent six nerves associated with the large intestines, rectum, kidney, bladder, sexual organ and testes. The circulation of the fluid substances in the body, their preservation and sustenance, is helped by this chakra. Mishra wrote that this chakra controls, governs and nourishes the legs. One feels magnetic pulsation, magnetic circulation and magnetic vibration by focusing here, and can remove all pains, aches, and diseases from the legs. Other physical conditions related to it include sexual problems, diabetes, kidney and bladder problems. By meditating on it one is relieved of egoistic feelings, petty impulses and desires. Qualities of equanimity and placidity of mind are developed.

Self-confidence and well-being are attributed to svadhisthana's proper functioning, while frustration, attachment and anxiety are associated with dysfunction. It is also associated with the sense of taste and the tongue. According to some of the tantras, to master it one must bring the tongue under control in such a way that the mind can think of nothing other than God and the tongue can utter nothing but references to the glories of God. Specific practices to control the tongue, pulling it into the back of the throat, often cutting it slightly over an extended period of time, are taught in some Tantric cults.

Manipura

Located above the svadhisthana opposite to the naval, the manipura is associated with Rudra, a god who grants boons and generates fear, representing the destructive principle of the universe (the world of mind). The Goddess Lakini Sakti, clothed in yellow, is called the universal benefactress, and in one text is described as loving the flesh of animals, having a breast covered with blood, and with fat dripping from her mouth. The animal symbol is the ram, a sacrificial animal, implying the need to sacrifice passions, impulsiveness and other strong emotions.

Concentration on manipura is said to bring realization regarding kala, or eternal time. It may be to this level of opening we can attribute memories of other lives, or experiences which carry people out of awareness of boundaries created by time. It is also associated with control of the element heat, and presides over agni, the fire-state, believed to govern the expansive movements of the being, and rule the digestive system. It controls the abdominal organs, particularly the functioning of stomach, liver and large intestine, and is related to the central nervous system, above the lumbar region. Focusing here is said by some to cure abdominal disease, especially if one meditates on the red color within it. Mastery of it means mastery of the subtle elements.

Ten petals, which carry the mental conditions of shame, treachery, jealousy, desire, drowsiness, despondency, worldliness, delusion, aversion and fear are identified with this chakra. However a yogi reportedly meditating on this chakra and uttering the mula mantra remains always in a happy mood, according to one tantric text and diseases cannot enter his/her body. Such a yogi can enter into the bodies of others and can see the siddhas (yogic saints and masters), recognizes the inherent qualities of material objects and sees beneath the earth. It is clear why the chakra is so commonly associated with issues of power, and the capacity to assert oneself effectively in the world. This is also the area of the hara, where attention is focused in certain Zen meditation practices. Such concentration accomplishes a sense of stability and centeredness in the being, as the above mentioned qualities are acknowledged, mastered and transcended.

Opening of this chakra is said to require the help of eyes, controlling their movements in such a way that they do not deflect even for a moment from the center located between the two eyebrows.

Anahata

The heart chakra is usually described as located opposite to the central line in between the two nipples, but sometimes placed slightly to the right of the sternum rather than directly over the heart. It is associated with conquest of the air element, and with nada, the sound of cosmic consciousness. When one focuses on meditation here energy can sometimes be felt flowing throughout the entire nervous system, as if it is full of magnetism. Many spiritual traditions emphasize the heart chakra as the primary chakra necessary to awaken in order to experience spiritual awakening, as this is where energies from lower and upper levels of consciousness merge, symbolized by two intersecting triangles. In addition to linking the energies of the chakras, it links left and right sides of the body, yin and yang characteristics. These two interlinking forms create a cross which symbolically represents integration of these polarities.

Isha is the God of this chakra, seated on a black antelope or a gazelle, a symbol of swiftness and the lightness of air. Isha is the supreme God endowed with complete yogic power, omniscient and omnipresent. He is white, symbolizing purity. He has three eyes, the third representing samadhi-knowledge. When his form appears in meditation, fear vanishes and concentration is strengthened.

Images in the yantra for the heart chakra include intersected triangles holding within a bright gold-colored being and a lightning-colored Kakini Sakti radiant with light and joy. Kakini is called the door-keeper of the anahata, and it is through concentration on her one learns to stabilize the prana and remove all obstacles to Isha. When she is red it indicates that her power is being utilized in the control of pranic energy; when she is white she is Isha-consciousness.

Twelve petals the color of vermilion are associated with anahata, representing the mental conditions of expectation, anxiety, endeavor, attachment, hypocrisy, infirmity, egoism, discretion, covetousness, fraudulence, indecision and regret. Meditation on this chakra is said to bring mastery of sound and using mula mantra with it is said to make one fit for God-realization, as one becomes capable of controlling the senses by restricting the sensation of touch. It is said no desire will then remain unfulfilled -- one will then always maintain a state of bliss.

Another way to view this is to consider that through releasing attachment to all of the things the "heart" desires (as evidenced by the mental conditions) one becomes capable of withdrawing the senses from worldly things, and thus is enabled to contact the experience of bliss, perhaps at first only for short periods, but ultimately in a permanent way. I am convinced from my work with Kundalini that it is just these desires and attachments, the expectations and emotions of the heart, that shut off the natural flow of bliss once it has awakened, and the ups and downs, which often accompany this experience emotionally, may be related to the issues of this chakra.

Qualities of compassion, acceptance and unconditional love are said to indicate a balanced functioning of the heart chakra; insensitivity, passivity and sorrow indicate an imbalance. Some writers have associated arthritis and respiratory problems, as well as cardiovascular and hypertensive illness with issues of the heart chakra.

Realization of the chakra is believed to require the help of skin, that is to transcend the sense of touch, which is done by bringing the power of sense perception under control through kumbhaka (breath retention). It is common to focus meditation on the heart chakra, imaging a light, or following the breath in and out of it, as ways of opening its energy. Pains and unfamiliar energy moving through the heart area are sometimes reported by people who have awakened Kundalini energy.

Visuddha

Located opposite to the throat, in the neck, the lotus of visuddha is gray or silver (or sometimes smoky-purple) and it has 16 petals. These are said to contain seven notes of the musical scale, poison and nectar, and seven "calls" used for purposes of exorcism, sacrifice, fire ceremonies, self-determination, blessings and exaltations. This suggests the beginning of priestly or occult powers, associated with the power of projection, or expression. The chakra is also associated with conquest of the ethereal state of matter (space) which governs the expressive mind. The expression of creative activity and inspiration are commonly connected with this chakra, along with the capacity to receive nurturing, especially the contact with the inner unlimited source of "grace". One begins to experience that the inner giver and receiver are one. Energizing this chakra may involve devotional practices such as ritual, prayer, chanting and using sound vibration, and creative expression.

The God of this chakra is Siva in a half-male, half-female form (Adrhanariswara) sitting on a white elephant accompanied by the yellow-colored Sakini Sakti (goddess) with four hands. He has mastered diverse knowledge. She reigns in the lunar region, over the minor mysteries.

The visuddha controls both arms and is the center of pratyahara, or sense-withdrawal. As one concentrates here one loses sensitivity to heat, cold, pain, pressure, touch and temperature in the arms. The tantras say its instrument is the ears, used in such a way that the sounds of the world are not distracting and only one sound is heard, either nada (a less intense sound of Om) or the name of God. Meditating on this chakra reportedly brings one to the threshold of great liberation.

Ajna

Located at the base of the nose between the two eyebrows, ajna is the source of two nervous flows, one through the eyes and the other through the mid-brain. Here the three principal nadis (sushumna, ida, and pingala) meet. This chakra governs inner vision and the dynamic activities of will and knowledge. This "third eye" has been associated in many cultures with light, inner knowing, intuition and psychic abilities. Awakening it brings specific progressive experiences such as intense light phenomena, visions of other dimensional realities, visions of the God one has worshipped, a connection with one's lineage, and merging in the sound of AUM. Opening to these capacities involves integration of both intellectual and emotional poles. According to Layayoga, it is when aroused Kundalini reaches this chakra that consciousness transforms.

The Goddess of ajna is Hakini Shakti, with six faces and six arms, representing the five principles of the lower chakras and the gifts of ajna chakra. When she is red this indicates Kundalini knowledge is fully awakened; when white she represents a state of calm; when dark-blue she is about to proceed into a formless state. If seen as a mixture of white, red and black she is demonstrating a blending of the three gunas -- sattva (harmonious consciousness), rajas (activity) and tamas (inertia).

Meditating on this center is said to bring visions of the highest truth as well as yogic powers, relief of all samskaras, and ultimately the wisdom of the Self, the highest knowledge. It is often referred to as the governing chakra for all of the others, and some yogis recommend concentration only at the ajna, or initially there, before awakening the energies of other chakras. It can impact the development of the qualities inherent in all of the preceding chakras, and enable an aspirant to reach a state of non-dual awareness. Complete mastery of the lower chakras is believed to be impossible until ajna is pierced.

Sahasrara

According to some scriptures the sahasrara is located at the crown of the head in the cerebrum; in others it is considered above the physical body, and is identical with Parambrahma, the supreme creator. Its lotus contains a thousand petals, of which five represent all the letters of the Sanscrit alphabet. Samadhi, as it is experienced through this chakra, is realization of universal existence, with no boundaries of "I" consciousness in the body. (There are yogic systems with additional levels of chakras, extending further beyond the physical body and, in these philosophies, this is only the initiation into the first level of higher consciousness.)

Parambrahma rules this center, symbolized by the triangle of consciousness (called Veeja), another name of the divine essences of sat, chit and ananda. This represents the overcoming of the obstacles, and merging into the void, or the supreme light beyond form, an experience beyond one's capacity to describe, according to most yogic scriptures and saints.

By meditating here, according to Bose and Haldor, one crosses the boundaries of creation, preservation, and destruction and can taste a sweet nectar (amrita) that flows in a constant stream from the sahasrara. One is emancipated and all samskaras are destroyed, so one is no longer subjected to birth nor to death. At this state of awakening, individual identity disappears forever and one identifies with supreme consciousness. (It is useful to remember that when yogis talk of a deathless state they do not usually mean one will literally never leave the body, but rather that conscious merging with the infinite is achieved as a permanent state which will not be disrupted by the body's dying.)[17]

Development & Expansion of Chakras

When Kundalini is awakened through all the chakras, occult abilities called "siddhis" may develop. These reportedly include the power of making one's body as minute as an atom, the power of increasing the weight or size of one's body at will, the power of making the body exceedingly light, the power of creating what one desires, the power of winning or hypnotizing others, occasional God-realization, and God-vision at desire. According to Motoyama, a Japanese parapsychologist and yogi, "These powers are automatically acquired by all good souls who can systematically concentrate on the life-force or Atman. The acquisition of these powers often operate as great stumbling blocks in the path of Self or God-realization, particularly when they are employed for personal glorification in any way."[18]

There are tales of Tantric adepts who acquire the ability to penetrate into the body of a dead person and animate it in its place; who become invisible; and who can fly in the sky or walk on water. These indicate mastery over the planes of creation, according to scripture. On the whole these extreme claims are not observed in Westerners who experience Kundalini, although one occasionally hears stories of a modern eastern spiritual teacher, such as Sai Baba, who performs some of them (i.e. materializing objects and transporting his body to distant places). It is interesting to me that similar themes sometimes appear in the dreams and fantasies of someone in this process.

Motoyama summarizes the significance of chakras as the centers of the body's energy system, existing in three different dimensions: physical, astral and causal, acting as intermediaries between these dimensions and capable of converting the energy of one dimension into that of another. Each chakra has its own sounds (nada and mantra) and geometrical figure (yantra), which can be perceived extrasensorily. The aura of an awakened chakra is brighter and larger than that of a dormant chakra, and emits more energy. Motoyama calls the awakening of chakras as of extreme importance in spiritual advancement, and states that overuse of one chakra is dangerous and can cause disease and even death.

Brugh Joy, a western physician, wrote that in working with chakra energy he noticed a field of energy radiating and extending as far as 20 feet away from the body of some people, and that he has located 40 such fields radiating from the body surface in the normal individual. He identifies 16 major points of energy, including the seven chakras commonly identified in the yogic system. He correlates certain physical and emotional problems with the strength of energy flows in various chakras.

Joy distinguishes between active chakras and awakened chakras: "Even in the most unawakened individual all the chakras in the human being are active, but in most people, they function primarily in relation to the physical body in the physical manifest plane and in the more subtle manifest plane, to the etheric (subtle) body. These chakras are in what is called a dormant or resting state of activity. Despite the terminology, energy activity from these dormant or resting chakras is readily felt with the scanning technique. An awakened chakra not only feels different in scanning, it looks different to clairvoyant vision." 19

Joy teaches practices that work with chakra energy fields to heal physical and psychological imbalances. His work demonstrates the possibility of sensing and affecting the energy through bodywork, an experience often reported by body therapists and psychics. Some healers focus on balancing the energy of the chakras, which seem to change in intensity as they hold their hands over someone's body. It is possible then to feel when the chakras are emitting approximately equal intensity.

Acupressure flows may also affect the distribution of pranic energies through the chakra system. People feel these movements and shifts while they are being worked on and often show remarkable changes in energy and well-being following treatments. Treatments of the spleen and the liver meridians should help to balance the distribution of energy and reduce extremes of heat or cold in the body, and acupressure flows for the heart or stomach meridians can ease problems that clients experience with Kundalini in those areas. I have found this effective in several cases. The usefulness of acupressure with Kundalini is basically untested, however, because few people are available with similar symptoms who are aware of the possibilities for help with this system. Research data is not yet available.

The Nadis & Prana

"The human body may look like a lump of flesh, but that's not really what it is" said Muktananda.

> In fact, it is a wonderful creation, composed
> of 72,000 nadis, or channels. These nadis,

> together with the six chakras and nine openings, form a sort of house. It is also sometimes called a twon, composed of seven elements. Of the 72,000 nadis, a hundred are important; and of these hundred, three are most important; and of these three, the central channel, called the sushumna, is supreme. All activities of life are carried out by the sushumna, which extends unbroken from the dwelling place of Parashiva in the sahasrara (the crown) to the site of the Kundalini in muladhara (the base of the spine).[20]

When the nadis and prana are purified, the level of meditation improves. To do this purification, Muktananda advised one to sit in the lotus posture for three hours. Yogic breathing practices and other exercises also purify this complex structure, and are often considered essential to a safe Kundalini awakening.

The three principal nadis (ida, pingala and sushumna), are considered the principle channels of spiritual force in the human system. Pandit described how to awaken Kundalini after one has followed the precepts and preparatory disciplines of yoga by withdrawing prana from the ida and pingala nadis, contracting the anus and collecting energy at the base of the spine until the body is devitalized and all the energy is drawn upward through the sushumna.

> . . . one then would practice opening the Kundalini by sitting in the prescribed asana, palms upward in the lap, with the focus of attention between the eyebrows. Air is inhaled and retained. The upper body is contracted and the upward breath checked, so that air is prevented from going upward and rushes downward. To prevent escape the lower body is contracted (the anus). The vayu (prana or air) thus collected goes directly to the muladhara and the mind and will concentrate on it with the result that the frictional pressure of prana and apana held tight together will

> generate intense heat, which arouses Kundalini, which moves upward. The initiate should concentrate on the mantra and the heart jigatma then moves down to unite with awakened shakti. This opens the mouth of the sushumna.[21]

Sushumna arises at the base of the spine, above the anus, and ends at ajna, between the eyebrows. The nadis ida and pingala also begin from the muladhara and rise towards ajna, but in a serpentine movement from left to right in the case of the ida, and inversely from right to left in the case of the pingala. Many yogis describe these as rising in a circular path surrounding each chakra but without actually passing through it in the way the sushumna does. After meeting at ajna they separate again. The ida then penetrates the left nostril, the pingala penetrates the right nostril. These nadis are subtle and invisible and are only seen through the psychic sense. The yogic practice of alternate-nostril breathing is intended to balance the cool (ida) and hot (pingala) energies of these two nadis and create balance and harmony in the nervous system.

Contributions of Subtle Body Theory

Yogic and tantric literature provide a comprehensive framework with which to explore the nature of pranic energy and its distribution through the body, the powerful effects of breathing techniques on this system, and the potential impact of Kundalini awakening. These teachings demonstrate links between the body, the mind and universal consciousness which go far beyond the capacity of models available in western medicine to explain the experience of Kundalini. They show specific correlation between various energy centers and emotional problems, demonstrate the value of mental discipline, and show the relationship of psychological health to the activity of Kundalini arising. Kundalini is both the stabilizing force in the normal physical system and a transformative force for those who are adequately prepared. Here a framework is offered for the development of a number of healing modalities which work directly with the subtle body and the distribution of prana through the nadis. All of these factors help clinicians to interpret Kundalini symptoms.

Whether or not one seeks a literal understanding of this metaphysical system, as a model it works like a mathematical formula. It is challenging to the mind to accept the presumption of a "mystical' body, yet no more difficult perhaps, than the challenge of modern day physicists to unravel the paradoxes of the submicroscopic phenomena of non-material reality. Physicist Fritjof Capra writes that since the 1920's physicists have had to wrestle with the awareness that the universe is not "a collection of separate objects but rather appears as a web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole", and Capra's explorations have led him to point out many correlates between Vedantic and Buddhist teachings and the discoveries of quantum physics.[22]

Despite the popular notion that there are basic building blocks in material reality, submicroscopic research serves to invalidate the assumptions about their nature, and presents scientists with a roaming particle-wave entity that inconsistently changes from one form to the other. Perhaps the realities of the "material" universe are elusive because they do not exist independently of the thought waves of cosmic creation, just as our physical body may be held together by a web of energies and thought waves in the subtle body, predetermined by an even more elusive potentiality in consciousness emerging from the causal body. I find subtle body theory very useful as a model with which to map and interpret these elusive waves and processes of the Kundalini experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

WESTERN PHYSIOLOGY: PLEASURE AND PAIN IN THE BRAIN

> I felt energy in my head, starting with a bursting in the throat which felt enormous, like a goiter, heavy and pulsating; then I would get shooting pains to the right of the third eye, and through the middle and back of the head, accompanied by yellow and white lights....subject, Jayne

All that we experience as conscious beings happens through our bodies. We are the producers of our own lives, living within a vehicle designed to experience and process an infinite range of phenomena. Our movements, sounds, impulses, emotions, memories, pleasures, pains, insights, and intelligence spring from within us and are the resources available to the Self. This Self is temporarily identified with a particular set of circumstances, contracted in such a way as to live out who we are. Although the Kundalini process may be initiated in the subtle body, the physical body must ultimately carry the impact of it.

It is necessary to explore responses of the physical body to Kundalini if we are to learn to differentiate between these responses and illness such as seizure disorder, Parkinson's disease, Tourette's syndrome, brain tumors and other problems that typically produce similar symptoms, namely jerks and spontaneous random movements, trance-states, visions, inner sounds, irrational mood swings, seeing intense lights, euphoria, the sudden reliving of early memories and many other phenomena. Recent research into patterns that accompany right-brain and temporal-lobe trauma suggests many ways in which brain stimulation by electrical disturbance or chemical interaction can produce Kundalini-like symptoms. These correlations indicate several possibilities:

1. Increased pranic activity and breathing irregularly increases the levels of energy pumped into the brain, or changes brain chemicals, and people respond in patterns that correlate with those areas of the brain which are being stimulated -- these may produce vision, sound, memory, movement, emotion and lights.

2. Some spiritual practices stimulate the production of certain brain chemicals that produce emotional swings from ecstasy to depression.

3. Certain states of consciousness promote waves of movement through the brain that set off patterns of physiological and emotional response. Brainwave biofeedback researchers have noticed unusual brainwave patterns when Kundalini is activated.

4. As we learn new practices we create expanded neuron networks and interconnections in the brain. If we do nonlinear practices that particularly stimulate the right brain (such as visualization, concentration on lights, chanting and the like) we increase the possibility for greater varieties of right-brained activity, such as creativity, vision, dreams, or merging into sound or space.

5. Is it possible there is a part of the brain prewired for the unitive experience? The trance-state of some epileptics plunges them into a black void in which they are aware they exist but have no input or capacity to act. How similar is this state to the Buddhist void? Is there a deeper experience where unitive oneness is inevitable? Are yoga practices, Shamanic rituals and breathwork simply

ways of activating chemicals or stimulating sections in the brain that produce this experience? Would spiritual awakening be any less real just because it was an innate brain process? The brain must also be stimulated when one "falls in love" or writes inspired poetry but these responses are not considered "unreal".

All individuals have unique brains that contain over 15 billion neurons, encoded with many possibilities, according to the genetics of our species, and developed and altered according to our experiences. Learning takes place because neuron pathways develop and link with one another in response to experiences. Nerve cells communicate through electrical signals that travel along fine extensions, forming millions of cells in complex circuits. It is inappropriate electrical activity, producing irregular or disorganized electrical charges, especially in the superficial areas of the brain, that triggers epileptic seizures and other symptoms of psychomotor disorder. These problems can be hereditary or occur in response to accidents or trauma. Some symptoms of psychomotor epilepsy, which may occur without ever demonstrating a grand mal seizure, are remarkably similar to Kundalini symptoms. These include falling into a trance or fugue-like state; loss of consciousness; visual or auditory hallucination; changes in vision, hearing, smell and taste; the appearance of lights; localized numbness; deja-vu (familiarity, as if one has been there before); and jamais-vu (a sense that a well-known place is foreign to one).

Factors known to trigger seizures in epileptics include starvation, dehydration, exhaustion, seeing a flashing light, infections, drug or alcohol abuse, dental problems, foot infections, viral syndromes and gum infections. A few of these factors are reflected in certain spiritual practices such as fasting, staring at a candle, and meditating long hours. Early warning signs of epilepsy include staring spells, bedwetting, memory gaps, wandering aimlessly, nocturnal tongue-biting, and having violent muscle spasms in sleep. Sometimes meditators fall into trances, experience short-term mental confusion, wander aimlessly and wake up with muscle spasms. We need to be able to differentiate qualitatively and quantitatively between the two experiences if one is not to be misinterpreted as the other. It is as unfortunate for someone with

Kundalini symptoms to believe they are neurologically ill as it is for one with epilepsy to go untreated.

It is important not to ignore the possible diagnosis of psychomotor epilepsy, or another disease that triggers epileptic symptoms, when there is pervasive evidence of these symptoms, especially if there are indications of a prior history, family hereditary factors, or a recent accident which might have triggered it. This doesn't mean one needs to discount spiritual components of the process if they are significant to the individual involved, for there is no reason that epilepsy would preclude an experience of spiritual awakening. However, if someone has many of these symptoms, it is appropriate to place them in the hands of a competent neurologist for an evaluation, especially if the trance states are dark and uncomfortable, and spontaneous rather than correlated with meditation.

Understanding brain physiology need not reduce mystical experience to a quasi-epileptic phenomenon. It could lay a foundation to support eastern theories that emphasize the developmental steps of spiritual awakening. Since learning takes place through the growth and interweaving of neuron patterns, it may be that practices such as yoga, meditation, visualization, breathwork, etc. may weave new strengths and possibilities in parts of the brain that would otherwise lay fallow, most likely the right-side of the brain. Artists, musicians and others with creative genius show evidence of greater right-brained development than people who pursue more intellectual and rational studies. If spiritual processes develop more of the right brain, this would explain the sudden surge of creative activity in many who have spiritual awakenings. It may also explain the capacities for healing and psychic insight that emerge spontaneously, sometimes following accidents that damage the right brain, as well as in the context of spiritual growth.

A Few Brain Functions

The following is a very simple description of some of the functions of the brain, and indicates how various patterns and processes occur which may have some bearing on the response of the brain during the Kundalini process. It is interesting to speculate on the interaction between the natural and "normal" functioning of the brain and the radical changes that may occur with Kundalini.

There are three distinguishable subdivisions of brain development, informally labeled reptilian (a depository for unlearned preprogrammed behavior, deeply buried beneath the surface); the old mammalian or paleomammalian (the limbic system's headquarters for emotions, survival and preservation concerns, pleasure and pain); and the neomammalian or neocortex (connected with the most recently developed capacities of civilized humans -- invention, abstract thought, and insight). Paul MacLean, creator of this triune brain theory, states that these three-in-one operate like "three interconnected biological computers, (each) with its own special intelligence, its own subjectivity, its own sense of time and space and its own memory."[1]

The Cortex

The cortex wraps around the brain in seven layers, contains 70% of the neurons of the central nervous system, and creates our capacities for speech, sight and sense capability. Each layer has varying numbers and kinds of cells. Firing between neurons sets up circuits in the brain called cell assemblies or neural nets, which interact and branch together in response to sensory stimuli. The largest number of cells in the brain are called "glial" (which means glue). Scientist and physician Richard Restak (The Brain: The Last Frontier) describes these as having a nutrient function, and says they have a relationship to the initiation and termination of seizures. There is evidence they have their own communicating network.

Dr. Marion Diamond, a professor and scientist at UC/ Berkeley found in her research with rats that when they were stimulated by living in enriched environments their brain chemistry changed and their cerebral cortices thickened by an average of 7%. Nerve cells grew larger and glial cells multiplied, chemical connection between the cells improved, and the dendrites lengthened and added new spines.[2] She discovered the brain's capacity to change and grow, a revolutionary idea in the 60's.

The Brain Stem

This is the major connecting source for sensory and motor signals between the spinal cord and the brain. It maintains consciousness through the mechanisms for breathing, heartbeat, sleeping and waking. It includes the reticular activating system, which keeps the brain awake even while sleeping and spreads alertness through excitation of the brain in response to stimuli; and the pons, which controls dreaming and waking. Just above the brain stem is the diencephalon, through which pass signals of the eyes, ears and senses as they move to the cortex. Next to this is the hypothalamus, which signals the release of hormones from the glands, and to which all parts of the limbic system are linked. These hormones regulate blood pressure, body temperature and appetite control centers. Damages to parts of the hypothalamus will cause animals to stop eating or gorge themselves. Electrical stimulation to parts of the hypothalamus triggers panic, rage and fear. Irregularities in eating patterns, heat and cold flashes, raised blood pressure and inexplicable emotional states occurring in Kundalini could therefore be responses of the hypothalamus to chemical or energetic changes.

The Cerebellum

Attached to the brain stem at the back of the skull, the cerebellum processes input from muscles, joints and tendons, and controls postures, equilibrium and movement. It contains movements within reasonable boundaries so that arms do not flail wildly when one is trying to engage in activity. Perhaps it is a reaction here that causes arms or legs to jerk randomly during a Kundalini episode.

The paleocerebellum governs proprioception -- our sense of ourselves as a body, which affects our balance and the ability to move. It holds a pattern in a giant feedback loop through the septum, hippocampus and amygdala, which carries electrical input from muscles, joints and tendons. Experiences of feeling weightless, out-of-the body, bigger than the body, or unable to control the body, and depersonalization (lack of identification with the body or with parts of the body/ not knowing who one is) are connected to inadequate functioning of the cerebellum or cerebellar-limbic nerve connections. It is possible that the energy rushes of a Kundalini process upset the normal electrical loop pattern in the paleocerebellum and this accounts for the out-of-body and other kinds of disassociative sensations felt by some people in this process.

Researcher and psychologist James Prescott says "to experience profound states of consciousness you've got to have the neural equipment. Sensory experience must be integrated into higher brain centers and that requires a cerebellar-limbic-neocortex connection." He says many people in our culture cannot experience this connection because our cultural preoccupation with anhedonia (joylessness) has stunted our neural pleasure systems. He believes women have neurocircuitry better suited to real spirituality because of the rich nerve connections between the cerebellum and the higher brain centers. He suggests that the difference in the cerebellum is responsible for floating, out-of-body sensations and the feeling of union in female orgasms.[3]

The Cerebrum

This is the newest development of the brain, covering 2/3 of its content, divided into two almost mirror-like hemispheres, the right, which controls the left side of the body, and the left, which controls the right side of the body. Visual perception is crossed correspondingly. The left side of the brain is oriented to time, analysis and logic. It seeks reason and explanation. The right side is oriented to space. When spontaneous activities are elicited through right-brain stimulation in the laboratory, the left-brain will develop a theory explaining it. There are kinds of brain damage in which it appears that the brain is split in such a way that one side has no awareness at all of what the other side does, and some scientists have speculated that problems such as split personality derive from this kind of brain dysfunction. (Psychologists might well argue this, as split personality can be healed through psychotherapy.)

It is interesting to speculate about the ways in which the struggle develops between the spiritual side, the creative or the Taoistic flowing aspects of human nature, and the more rigid, concretized and security-minded self during processes of individuation and spiritual awakening. The right side of the brain may hold the template of spiritual experience, activated through spiritual practices, while the left-brain holds the template for management of the civilized material world. The flow of ida and pingala nadis may represent at the subtle level the need to bring into balance and order the activities of these two sides.

The Limbic System

Located deep in the cerebrum, this part of the brain is a lobe which surrounds the brain stem and has extensive connections with the olfactory structures, drives and emotional responses, as well as the storage of memory. It occupies the lower one-fifth of the brain. Experiments in stimulating the limbic system indicate that certain cells hold rage, joy or fear, but that which cells do what seems to vary among individuals and from day to day.

Psychiatrist Daniel Weinberger states "Electrodes in this area produce schizophrenialike phenomena, such as 'forced thinking', bodily illusions, fear, ineffable somological experiences, paranoia. If the connections between the limbic forebrain and the frontal lobe are disordered, you've lost one of the highest integrative systems in the brain."[4] All of these symptoms sound precisely like some of the core vulnerabilities during Kundalini awakening -- unpredictable thoughts and images, body sensations and movements, and fears. Theoretically, spiritual awakening launches a direct assault against the drives and emotions, challenging one to move beyond instinctual responses. Such energy may produce confusion and unbalance the integrative capacities. This would explain in theory why there is value in the long disciplined apprenticeship designed by yogis to precede awakening, which helps one establish moderate habits and perspectives beyond the range of ordinary responses to drives and emotions.

The Lobes

There are four set of lobes. The temporal lobes are above the ears on either side of the head, and connect to the limbic system. They appear to function like memory and storage systems, and long-term memory is damaged if they are injured. Electrical stimulation to this area triggers out-of-context emotions, weird reveries or dreamy states, deja-vu (a sense of familiarity) and jamais-vu (the familiar seems foreign). People with temporal-lobe epilepsy (which is an infusion of chaotic energy) may have none of the seizures commonly thought to be epileptic, and instead have these primary symptoms. Electrical probes in this area produce sudden flashes of the past, including all the emotions, sounds and smells of the event.

Neurologist Oliver Sachs attributes the experience of powerful imagery, mystical experiences such as those of Hildegarde of Bergin, and the feeling of being transported in time and space, to abnormal stimulation of the temporal lobes and limbic system. He considers the possibility that such experiences, even if induced by epilepsy, may be "portals to the beyond or the unknown."[5]

Stanford neuro-physiologist Karl Pribram has reported that "A lesion in the temporal lobe near the amygdala can produce something akin to mysticism. There is a disruption in self-awareness. There is a kind of consciousness-without-content, like the oceanic consciousness of the mystical state. The distinction between the self and the other disappear."[6] Paul MacLean reports that during temporal-lobé seizures people may have "this Eureka feeling all out of context -- feelings of revelation, that this is the truth, the absolute truth, and nothing but ---the truth."[7]

Arnold Mandell, physician, philosopher and professor at U.C. San Diego, says that temporal-lobe epileptics may experience "long-lasting beatific states, permanent personality changes, and religious conversions."[8] He thinks mystical revelations spring from a state similar to epilepsy, which he likens to a raging electrical storm in part of the brain. Ordinarily the cells of the hippocampus, a brain structure shaped like a sea-horse which is critical to memory formation, are inhibited by a chemical called serotonin. When this is deficient they fire in over-excited kindlinglike fashion. The hippocampus ordinarily modulates information between inner and outer environments, seems to generate a movement toward novelty (exploring something new), and adjusts moods and emotions to incoming data. When this electrical storm overpowers its function the inner reality becomes dominant. Hallucinogenic drugs dampen serotonin in order to create their psychedelic affect. So do long-distance running and meditation.[9]

The parietal lobes stretch over the cortex of the brain, and hold maps covering every inch of both motor and tactile regions of the body. This is the area identified by Itzhak Bentov and Lee Sannella as the site of a speculated progressive sensory-motor cortex syndrome -- the physio-kundalini complex. A pattern of points (distributed roughly in the shape of a man) correlate sequentially to a pattern of symptoms the two had identified as a typical response to Kundalini awakening. That is if each of these points were stimulated sequentially they would follow a pattern of symptoms often reported with Kundalini that begin with the left toe. Bentov stated that in epileptic conditions the sequence of symptoms moved in the direction opposite from that of Kundalini, beginning with lips and face and ending in the feet. He therefore speculated that Kundalini could be a potential antidote for epilepsy and suggested that meditation, which could trigger it, might reverse the pattern of the disease.

The frontal lobes are in the front of the brain, behind the forehead (the area of the third eye), the section of brain once commonly lobotomized to cure violent and distractible behavior. Brain scientists once believed it was not an important area for overall functioning. But lesions (and lobotomies) here cause great distractibility, the inability to carry out complex actions, listlessness, shallowness in thought and feeling, insensitivity, and poor organization of intellectual activity. Some researchers have concluded that this area probably controls awareness, self-awareness and the quality of empathy.[10]

The occipital lobe, containing the primary visual area, is located at the back of the head. Damage here causes loss of the visual field, or blindness.

Chemical Correlations

It was not until the discoveries of the chemists in the 1960's that the potential existed for creating laboratory chemicals that duplicated chemicals in the human body, which made possible their ingestion to adjust body chemistry, and stimulated wide-ranging research. All moods, compulsions, emotions and behaviors involve a complicated interaction of chemicals labeled by brain scientists as neurotransmitters, precursor enzymes, metabolizing enzymes and neuropeptides (brain-hormones). Until the 1970's only six neurotransmitters were identified, but now it is known there are at least 100 to 200 others waiting to be defined and understood. Receptors in the brain are designed to respond to these chemicals, and other chemicals may block their receptivity.

For example there are natural opiates in the brain and specific receptors to receive them. Although they have a variety of Latin names they are commonly called endorphins, short for "endogenous morphine." These are potent painkillers and there is evidence they are the reasons certain analgesics work -- acupuncture, electrical brain stimulation and the placebo effect. Compulsive runners have been found to have elevated beta-endorphin levels as do anorexics, schizophrenics and meditators.[11]

Following research showing that baby guinea pigs, puppies and chicks stopped crying for their mother when given low levels of endorphins, Scientist Jack Panksepp surmised that "Perhaps brain opiate systems can create feelings of belonging, so people who are lonely and isolated can use narcotics as a substitute for interpersonal bonds."[12]

Long-distance runners produce endorphins that cause the euphoria that follows a race. Other activities that naturally trigger endorphin release are eating, music, pleasurable events, massage, and meditation. It is clear that this chemical stimulates a strong sense of well-being. Laboratory rats, when given the option of self-administering endorphins over food, will self-stimulate to the point of starvation and exhaustion.

The brain receptors that receive endorphins are in a recently evolved area of the brain, and parts of the brain are crowded with them. Their function appears to be to receive information and interpret it so that we can decide how to respond to the environment. They help us identify pleasurable activities and events.

Although extremely seductive for drug-users, research shows that the use of opiates will not induce a permanent euphoria. Long-term use of cocaine, heroin and other street drugs cause depression, apathy and withdrawal conditions. These conditions can also follow meditative experiences, and those who meditate are amazed to discover that following a blissful hour of absorption, they are sometimes irritable. It is likely that when one breaks through from "disciplined" meditation into the stage of feeling peace and pleasure consistently in meditation, the endorphin system has been triggered through deep concentration. (Similarly to the hibernating animal, who also has high endorphin levels and is oblivious to cold weather and activity outside itself.)

Flashes of visions, body numbness, involuntary movements and jerks, reduced sexual interest (or sexual arousal), and reduced appetite, are all responses that some people experience in meditation which may well correlate with increased endorphin levels. The released opiates produced are sending messages to the brain that are interpreted as positive, and one experiences spontaneous pleasure and contentment with what is. The capacity of yogis to detach from home, family and emotional relationships may also be a correlate of endorphin flooding. Endorphins undoubtedly account in part for the emotional ups and down that accompany awakening spiritual energy. It may be that when spiritual seekers stabilize their energy, what is happening is that a steady stream of endorphins are being released in the body.

There is also evidence that when endorphin levels increase in the brain, they are reduced in the spine. So it may be that certain yogic breathing and visual practices, or activities like kriya yoga, where concentration is focused on moving energy up the spine, may be moving endorphins from the spine into the brain receptors until high level of pleasures are produced.

In the 1950's scientists discovered that the reduction of another brain chemical, dopamine, decreased the hallucinations experienced by schizophrenics, and believed the disease was due to dopamine imbalances complicated by varieties of neurochemical system disturbances. Other researchers identified dopamine as an amplifier for all sensory input, and said the real disturbance had to do with the way sensory input affected the brain. Various studies have promoted a variety of conclusions regarding the parts of the brain which must be "damaged" or "abnormal' to produce such input.

Dopamine receptors appear to decrease with age, the male brain losing about 40% and the female about 25%. This has an impact on psychomotor coordination. A deficiency of dopamine in some brain pathways is also known to trigger shaking limbs, rigid musculature and the blank stare that accompanies Parkinson's disease. The drug levodopa (L-dopa) brought many people who suffered Parkinson's back to life after spending years in the back wards of hospitals. However its side-effects included hallucinations, delirium, murderous rages, involuntary movements, delusions, ticks and compulsive growling.[13] (Many of these symptoms are occasionally reported in stories of Kundalini arousal, so perhaps dopamine levels rise at times in this process.)

Another chemical transmitter, acetylcholine, when injected into the septal area of the brain, causes vigorous activity including multiple sexual orgasms, lasting as long as 30 minutes. Spontaneous orgasms are also frequently reported in people who experience Kundalini awakening.

It is clear that various chemical receptors respond to increases and decreases of chemicals in the brain by creating dramatic emotional, visual and physiological phenomena. Activities which utilize breath, energy, visualization and other kinds of sensory input may impact the stimulation of such chemicals. Much is left to be identified and understood about brain chemistry in general (only a fraction of chemicals has even been identified), and it is impossible to do any more than speculate about the correlations between chemically-produced imbalances and sensorily-stimulated activities, although correlations between drug experiences and mystic experiences have consistently been noted in the literature.

Arnold Mandell has produced some of the most substantive research exploring links between brain chemistry and transcendent experience, reported in a paper titled "Toward a Psychology of Transcendence: God in the Brain", included in a book exploring consciousness and biology, The Psychobiology of Consciousness (1980). In it he theorizes "there is a biogenic aminetemporal-limbic neurology for transformed consciousness" and "Western man turning inward for metaphysical solutions has biological mechanisms with which to rationalize the journey."[14] He develops his theories based on biological psychiatry related to what is called the pharmacological bridge, and the mechanisms which control the system of forebrain limbic excitation, and credits William James for introducing "the proposition that transcendental experience was similar wherever he examined it and that the most commonly evoked source, God, was in the brain."[15]

Mandell cites numerous research efforts which present a startling case for the concept of "God in the brain." He hypothesizes that it is possible that a decrease and/or release of seratonin (which can be caused by the use of amphetamines, cocaine and hallucinogens, as well as meditation or running) inhibits the regulation of hippocampal pyramidal cells, leading to their hyperexcitability and the loss of the cell's "gating" tendency (a tendency to match external events with internal responses). This leads to unitive experience and a sense of having found "truth", as one is no longer using the comparative and evaluative function of the brain. In addition, "Increased excitability in temporal lobe limbic structures as reflected in synchronous discharges from the region are associated with personality changes similar to those seen with religious conversion."[16] This may occur because the cells in the hippocampus overexcite themselves and die, creating a neurological state of transcendent consciousness, and an experience of emotional flooding. He believes this cell death may account for the positive changes reported in personality following an experience of religious transcendence. Some researchers have found that these cells are dead in the brains of psychomotor epileptics who report experiencing religious conversion, hyposexuality, transcendent consciousness, good nature and emotional deepening. He speculates that "repeated or overwhelming episodes of loss of serotonin inhibition" may occur in those who follow prolonged running, meditation or the use of hallucinogens, duplicating the kinds of personality changes attributed to transcendent experience.[17]

What is clear from the scores of papers collected and synthesized by Mandell is that biochemical reactions can produce symptoms or phenomena closely akin to some of those demonstrated by people during a Kundalini process or a spiritual awakening. This includes reported ecstasy, unitive awareness, interest in spiritual matters, compulsive writing, a conviction of insight and long-term positive personality changes. But many questions must be raised when we pursue this line of research, which presently omits any study of people clearly identified as Kundalini-awakened or mystics. Mandell has merged many terms under the heading transcendent experience, as varied as St. Paul's "peace that passeth understanding", Maslow's "peak experience", Jung's "individuation", Lao

Tse's "the absolute Tao", satori, samadhi, Gopi Krishna's Kundalini awakening, and terms such as "divine spirit" and "intensity experience". It is a safe conjecture that many of these experiences, subjectively described, vary from one another substantially, to say nothing of their variations from the experiences of those having a seizure, taking a drug, or being poked with an electrical probe in a laboratory. All extraordinary experiences are not the same, nor are they likely to share one cause.

However there are enough correlates that it is reasonable to assume that meditation, breathing practices and the awakened Kundalini may have an impact on brain chemistry or electrical function. In fact some eastern teachers have indicated that the Kundalini process entirely redesigns the structure of the cells, and others see the restructuring of the human brain as an evolutionary necessity made possible by Kundalini awakening.

But there are dangers in using Mandell's "biogenic aminetemporal lobe limbic neurology" as a catch-all description of the brain's response to ecstatic, unitive and transcendental states. Do we then assume all mystics suffer temporal-lobe epilepsy, or that all epileptic seizures are spontaneous efforts toward mysticism? Do we give the brain complete credit for all aspects of consciousness, eliminating in one stroke thousands of years of mystical teachings? Or are such teachings only a response to an instinctive move toward *brain evolution,* nudging us toward a destiny of living in attunement with the temporal lobes as their cells are dying and slower waves are wafting through the brain?

This approach implies that years of spiritual practices and the greatest teaching of saints are simply a result of biochemical changes which could as easily be gained through drugs or an electrical probe in the brain. Such a quick fix appeals greatly to western egos. If it is so clearly possible to turn sinners into saints, antagonism into love, and rage into peace with a pill or a probe perhaps we should engage these techniques on populations of hardcore criminals, turning them into the likes of Anandamayi Ma, Krishnamurti, Yogananda and similar loving and wise presences. If drugs created true mystics we would have no concern about their proliferation in ghettos, schools and corporations, and would anticipate enlightenment from those we currently treat for addiction, abuse and drug-related crimes.

Another danger is that of reducing what is a powerful healing and transformative event to a biochemical malfunction of the brain. The brain may be designed to be ultimately opened to transcendent and unitive experiences, ecstasy and insight, but it is hardly an illness should this occur. As the brain is attuned and develops a capacity to withstand stepped-up pranic energies and divine intuitions it can perhaps open more to dimensions beyond the range of western science and glimpse a consciousness existing far beyond itself. Perhaps a transformed temporal lobe is the nub of the future brain, the next step in evolution. Perhaps the slower rhythms engaged in a transcendent experience are a correlate to those sattwic (harmonious) qualities of the causal body, which as they permeate human consciousness make possible liberation. However it occurs we may hope for an evolutionary process which gives us greater access to wisdom, harmony and creativity.

Mandell's theories suggest some interesting potentials for research into the nature of the changes triggered by Kundalini awakening and other mystical experiences if they can be used as a two-way door -- not to reduce the mystical experience to a simple (or even a complex) brain function, but to open consideration of brain function in relationship to cosmic awareness, to see the temporal lobe (or the unexamined frontal lobes, the location of the third eye) as points from which to expand into a range of wisdom beyond intellectually-dominated dualistic thinking. At this point cosmology and biology may begin to merge.

Brain-Wave Theories

Itzhak Bentov, a creative inventor of biomedical equipment who did much research with the human nervous system, and reportedly had personal experiences with Kundalini energy, defined what he labeled the physio-kundalini syndrome, following his work using ballistocardiography to study physiological changes which occurred in the bodies of meditators. This syndrome was later described in the work of physician Lee Sannella, and has been used as a model for describing the Kundalini process to physicians.

Bentov observed that certain mechanical vibrations, electromagnetic waves or sounds could trigger in a laboratory a response in non-meditators that was similar to waves produced in the brain through meditation. He rigged up a biofeedback system using a pulsating magnetic field around the head that stimulated such waves. In an effort to explain spontaneous Kundalini awakening he suggested that people with particularly sensitive nervous systems might react spontaneously to exposure to similar frequencies for prolonged periods of time, such as by riding in a car whose suspension and seat combination produce that range of vibration, or by sitting for long periods next to an air-conditioning duct.

Bentov related the mildness or severity of symptoms to the amount of stress held in the body, and emphasized that only when Kundalini reaches these areas of stress do symptoms become troublesome. He cited researcher Hans Selye's work with stress to support the fact that the nervous system can be so busy handling stresses that its potential for attaining higher states of consciousness is very limited. He believed that this was why all schools of meditation emphasize the importance of calming down the body. These stresses are actually energy patterns, that must be converted and eliminated, and this usually occurs involuntarily through body movements, unexpected emotional releases, or inexplicable pains in some area of the body. He recommended meditation with light body-toning exercises, such as some hatha yoga postures, and mild breathing exercises, as the most effective, inexpensive and fastest system for the removal of stress from the body. Bentov identified the physio-kundalini syndrome as:

> A sequence of bodily symptoms (which) usually starts at the left foot or toes, either as a mild tingling stimulus or as cramps. The stimulus continues up the left leg to the hip. In extreme cases, there is a paralysis of the foot and of the whole leg. Loss of sensation in large areas of the skin of the leg may occur. From the hip the stimulus

> moves up the spine to the head. Here sometimes severe headaches (pressure-like) may develop. In case of prolonged and severe pressures in the head, degeneration of the optical nerve may set in, with accompanying visual impairment, loss of memory and general disorientation.[18]

Bentov identified this progressive sensory-motor cortex syndrome with the physiology of Kundalini, but he emphasized that this concept is larger than physiology because planetary and spiritual forces also come into play. In his physiological model meditators produce acoustical standing waves in the cerebral ventricles which trigger heart sounds that cause vibrations in the walls of ventricles (fluid-filled cavities in the brain). These vibrations will stimulate and eventually "polarize" the cortex in such a way that it will tend to conduct a signal along the homunculus in a closed-loop pattern, starting from the toes up, which is in contrast to the way the brain normally handles a signal. He tried to show that the layout of points corresponds closely to the path the Kundalini takes in the body, as described in esoteric literature. He felt the states of bliss obtained by those who experience this closed loop of energy may occur as a self-stimulation of the pleasure centers in the brain, caused by the circulation of a "current" along the sensory cortex.

Bentov described most of the symptoms as occurring on the left side of the body, and therefore termed it mostly a development occurring in the right hemisphere, which he said follows logic, since we are using our reasoning, rational, logical, linear thinking left hemisphere all the time, while meditation tends to stimulate the nonverbal, feeling, intuitive right hemisphere.

Dr. Sannella, a psychiatrist and ophthalmologist, described Bentov's theories when he published a brief but significant study of the Kundalini process, Kundalini -- Psychosis or Transcendence, (later expanded and updated as The Kundalini Experience) and he also addressed the similarity of some psychotic symptoms to Kundalini symptoms, saying that patients were inappropriately diagnosed and treated due to the inability of the medical profession to identify this experience. He included 11 cases of people with physical and emotional symptoms related to Kundalini, and differentiated the conditions that distinguish Kundalini from psychosis.

He wrote that people with Kundalini symptoms often experience hearing voices, seeing visions, and moving in patterns that seem irrational to the uninitiated, so are sometimes subjected to medication and confinement in institutions. But they are different from psychotics in that they are rarely inclined to act out if feeling hostile or angry, are more objective about themselves and interested in sharing what is going on in them, and are more likely to experience sensations of heat, vibration, tingling and itching that move in definite patterns over the body. They may see bright lights internally, experience pains in their heads, demonstrate unusual breathing patterns or spontaneous movements, and hear chirping or whistling sounds. Voices are heard, but these are perceived to come from within and are not mistaken for other realities. He stated that the outcome of Kundalini awakening, when handled appropriately, was generally positive and creative, with the subjects reporting less stress, more fulfillment, and more peace.[19]

Sannella also said that in some cases a condition appearing like schizophrenic can result if the person receives negative feedback from others, or feels resistance to interpretation regarding the Kundalini experiences. He speculated that people who were psychic were most susceptible to awakening Kundalini and most likely to find the process violent and disturbing, because they had especially sensitive nervous systems. Many of his subjects had psychic experience prior to awakening. He suggested that there may be three categories of responses to spiritual practices -- visionary, psychic and Kundalini experiences.

Comments of Dr. Sannella's, given in a talk at the U.C. Medical School in San Francisco in the Spring of 1981, have been circulated in a California hospital to inform physicians of Kundalini symptoms. In this memo Kundalini is presented as an unusual neurological complex or syndrome appearing among some meditators. It describes the following signs:

> Its motor signs are swaying, shaking, jumping, twitching, posturing, grimacing, crying

> out, and unusual patterns of breathing. The sensory experiences are the seeing or sensing of internal lights and hearing internal sounds, very hot and cold areas on or inside the body, tingling, numbness, pain, partial paralysis, ecstasy, fear, and entrancement. The amount of energy involved seems inexplicable in normal metabolic terms. When the process ends naturally, the disturbances abate and the personality may be permanently changed....The symptoms suggest internal stimulation or hypersensitivity of the sensory-motor cortex and deeper underlying and adjoining structures of the brain. A neurophysiological model based on resonances generated in the meditator has been formulated by Itzhak Bentov to explain this phenomenon. It has been partially confirmed by measurements of sounds heard and of changes in the body's micromotions during meditation.[20]

Dr. Sannella's acceptance in medical circles allows him to make a significant contribution towards alleviating the misdiagnosis of the Kundalini experience, and he is able to use Bentov's neurophysiological model aligned with medical terminology in a way that makes it understandable to physicians. It is questionable, however, whether Bentov's work is related to Kundalini so much as to pranic releases. Since he writes of simulating these conditions in the laboratory, there seems to be an absence of samadhi-like states, and the outcome of releasing the stressors appears to be primarily relaxation, it is likely the subjects are not experiencing a true Kundalini awakening.

Mary Scott, who spent years in India researching the nature of Kundalini energy, wrote that Bentov's and Sannella's work is ingenious and well-reasoned and makes out a good case for a definite physiological mechanism, but it was unclear whether the cycle had a direct connection with Kundalini, as it is understood in tantra. She theorized that the complex Bentov identified may be more related to locked-in brain waves correlated with deep relaxation states achieved in meditation; to stress patterns caused by conflicts between interference with the natural patterns of the psyche; or to splits between the surface and subliminal levels of the self.

Scott pointed out the disruptive nature of taking on the change of orientation that accompanies many who adopt meditation practices and the pressures on the ego when an emergent subliminal system pushes to remove it from the center stage of the psyche, and impulses are coming from two centers of control, the ego and the Self. She theorized that movement and distribution of energy in the two subtle bodies would create excess stress at the root of the sushumna, from which all the nadis rise, which might then trigger the physio-kundalini syndrome.[21]

It seems to me that recognition of the physio-kundalini syndrome need not prove or disprove the awakening of Kundalini, but is descriptive of the pranic symptoms that meditators may experience. It may be a sign of an inner conflict between ego and Self, as Scott suggests, or a symptom related to blockages in the subtle body that one taps into during altered states, or it could be a response triggered by stimulation to the brain.

Fire & the Big Toe

Bentov's observation of activity in the left toe has an interesting correlate with a yogic practice of reflection on the right toe in order to raise fire in the body. This stirring of activity in the toes of the uninitiated may be a spontaneous response, like a kriya, because it mirrors an ancient yogic sakti practice. In the 4th sutra of the Siva Sutras a method of contemplation is taught that is said to bring about the dissolution of identification of the gross, subtle and causal bodies by using the image of burning up successively the entire subtle body system. The initiate does this through contemplation on the right toe, in which the deity of burning light, Kalagni Rudra, is housed. The aspirant focuses on this burning imagery, allowing it to rise throughout the system until complete absorption into divine consciousness is experienced. This practice is called *dahabhavana*.[22]

This practice is also notable because of rumors that many people hear about yogis who "burn up" or disappear in a blaze of spontaneous combustion. This may well be linked to a literal interpretation of this ancient practice of Kashmir Saivism. It is certainly possible for over-zealous manipulation of heat and prana to "burn out" or damage the physical and subtle body systems, just as drug use and other kinds of abuse can do. Although a few tales of apparent spontaneous combustion do exist in the annals of fire department emergency calls, the only concrete evidence I have come across that such a thing might occur literally *due to spiritual practices* is in the remarkable story of St. Catherine of Genoa, a Christian mystic who seems to have burned to death internally.

St. Catherine was a 15th century Italian, a married noblewoman who led a life of social action, self-sacrifice, austerity and contemplation. She frequently reported unbearable heat as well as ecstasy and she endured long periods unable to eat. During the four months before her death at age 63, she underwent an illness so intense that not a part of her body was free from a torment by fire, including much internal bleeding, and vomiting gallons of blood so hot that it boiled. Numerous doctors studied this phenomena and labeled it supernatural. At this time she experienced visions of God and for two days she was in a trance where she saw a vision of herself without body and without soul, with her spirit "completely in God, and having lost sight of heaven and earth, as if she no longer existed." This is clearly the "dissolution" the Yoga Sutras describe.

On another day she felt a nail driven into her heart, which caused great pain for ten hours. The next day she felt great joy and "saw a ray of divine love that was almost unbearable and burned up her humanity" and "saw a ladder of flame and felt herself drawn upwards, experiencing great joy therein". Because of the internal heat she asked if the world was on fire, and all were amazed that she could stay alive at all given the intensity of the fire, and the fact she was unable to take any food or water. Her body turned completely yellow, and remained so after death, when it appeared dried up but showed no other signs of deterioration. It still exists intact in a crystal casket in the Pammatone Hospital Chapel in Genoa.[23]

Whether or not Catherine's fire began in the big toe, it clearly affected the blood. In the acupressure system the big toe is the source point of the spleen meridian which stores blood and destroys old blood cells, produces plasma cells which make antibodies, and is tied to the immunologic system. It modulates energy in the body and affects connective tissue, the blood, mouth, tongue and taste sense. It is said to have peculiar affinity for certain aspects of sexual maturing and creative processes, and acupuncturist Mary Austin wrote it may "impact tardy developments and intellectual blockages" and "nurture higher psychological states", as well as figure "prominently in treatment of genitalia malfunctions, both male and female."[24] This suggests that intense energy through it might impact sexuality, psychological states and mental clarity. It may be that meditation or laboratory experiments with energy may send an overload of energy through this meridian, which contributes to problems from the toe upwards, and accounts for some of the symptoms. Excessive heat focused on the toe would impact and heat the blood and thus could easily bring a sensation of fire flashing through the entire body.

Bliss & the Brain

While judging from the easy addiction of laboratory rats it is quite likely that something akin to blissful experiences can be triggered by the stimulation of a certain pleasure center in the brain, there does not appear to be only one kind of bliss associated with Kundalini, nor does Kundalini need to be awakened in order to experience stimulation of this pleasure center. Experiments with laboratory rats indicate that if this point is stimulated they will become so addicted to it they will no longer bother to eat, and I would surmise this does not indicate they have awakened Kundalini, which brings with it a capacity for higher consciousness. In humans who are not being manipulated by electric probes the bliss of the reactive pleasure center is more likely the consequence of a deeply relaxed state of consciousness that redistributes, reorganizes or increases pranic activity so that it will stimulate this point.

There are scriptures that state 27 varieties of bliss accompany awakening, and I have recorded a wide range of these, ranging from bliss isolated in particular body parts such as the legs or jaw, or along one side of the body only, to feeling completely disengaged with the body and being dissolved into another field entirely, to being seized with ecstatic energy rolling down the shoulders or up the spine when doing activities totally unrelated to meditation or relaxation (like walking down the street). Bliss can occur as intense uncontrollable heart energy radiating outward, or as a sensation like melting when two people merge their energetic fields. It can vibrate the body the way a harpist plucks the strings, sending delicious rivulets of energy throughout. It can feel like firecrackers going off inside. It can be an utter, indescribable sinking into peace and understanding. It can be a flash, or it can last for days. The intensity and quality vary incredibly, and it does not seem possible to me that all of it is generated by the same isolated flow of energy identified by Bentov, or one simple pleasure center in the brain, nor to the decreased seratonin described by Mandell.

CHAPTER FIVE

EXPRESSING THE INEXPRESSIBLE: THE LITERATURE OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Understanding the parameters of the Kundalini process makes reading the works of prophets, poets and biographers a new adventure, for it becomes possible to read between the lines and into the spiritual experiences alluded to in philosophy, biography, literature and poetry. It is clear such experiences have not occurred only among acknowledged mystics and saints.

Richard Bucke, a prominent psychiatrist who in 1901 wrote Cosmic Consciousness, a treatise on spiritual illumination, described the experience as consciousness of the life and order of the universe. He believed this awareness brings with it a level of illumination which makes one nearly a member of a new species, along with impeccable morals, and indescribable joy. He felt the new moral sense would be more important to humanity than even enhanced intellectual power.

Bucke predicted a psychic revolution that would lead to the "melt-down" of all religions, and the "revolutionizing of the human soul", so that a new kind of religion would dominate the world. He expected immortality and glory would exist in the here and now, and evidence of it would live in every heart. Doubt of God and eternal life would become impossible. Such consciousness would replace the self-consciousness presently governing humankind, and this shift would be as major as the shift from unconsciousness to self-consciousness when it occurred at the dawn of civilization. Clearly he was no ordinary psychiatrist!

Bucke was a distinguished scientist and physician, who was Superintendent of the Provincial Asylum for the Insane at two major hospitals in Ontario. Later he became Professor of Mental and Nervous Diseases at Western University in London, Ontario, and President of the Psychological Section of the British Medical Association and the American Medico-Psychological Association. In 1867, at age 35, he experienced a major shift in his awareness through reading the works of Walt Whitman. In 1872, while visiting in London, he experienced what he termed "Illumination", while riding in the back of a cab returning from an intense evening of reading with friends the writings of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Browning, and Whitman. He described his mental state as calm and peaceful, with his mind under the influence of the "ideas, images and emotions called up by the reading and talk of the evening." As recorded in the foreword of Cosmic Consciousness:

> All at once, without warning of any kind, he found himself wrapped around, as it were, by a flame-coloured cloud. For an instant he thought of fire -- some sudden conflagration in the great city. The next (instant) he knew that the light was within himself. Directly after there came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness, accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination, quite impossible to describe. Into his brain streamed one momentary lightning-flash of the Brahmic splendor which ever since lightened his life. Upon his heart fell one drop of the Brahmic bliss,

> leaving thence-forward for always an aftertaste of heaven.[1]

Many years later Bucke produced the book in which he explored the awakening of cosmic consciousness in Buddha, Jesus, St. Paul, Plotinus, Mohammed, Dante, Francis Bacon, William Blake, Honorede Balzac, Walt Whitman and other distinguished poets, philosophers and authors. Bucke's descriptions of illumination correlate with literature describing what would be identified as Kundalini experiences in the East, and echo descriptions of cosmic truths reported by great sages in every tradition. They do not, however, describe a full range of what can be identified as Kundalini.

Great western poets such as Walt Whitman and T. S. Elliot allude in mysterious couplets to the power of spiritual consciousness (as have Christian, Sufi and Indian poets), but it was Indian gurus and other spiritual teachers who first specified the details of this personal encounter with this numinous energy. Such biographical and autobiographical material is invaluable for the study of this process. Some of the stories from India available now for Westerners include those of Anandamayi Ma, Ramana Maharshi, Caitanya, Sri Aurobindo, Yogananda, Muktananda, Krishnamurti, Gopi Krishna, Ramakrishna, Milarepa, and B.S. Goel.

Several Westerners who have followed eastern spiritual paths and teachers have also written of the Kundalini experience. These include Da Free John, a self-styled spiritual teacher from New Jersey who had experiences of light from early infancy and later studied with Muktananda and others; Motoyama, a Japanese parapsychologist and yogi; The Mother, a French woman who followed Aurobindo and later headed his organization; Kennett Roshi, a German woman who became a Buddhist monk, and founded an Abbey in California; Swami Radha, a German woman who became a yogi, and founded ashrams in California and Canada; and Irina Tweedie, a European who studied in India with a yogi who followed a Sufi path in his teachings.

Others have written of awakenings that occurred with little or no structured practices but that led them to explore eastern mysticism, including Chilean Miguel

Serrano, once an Ambassador to India; American physicians Brugh Joy, Gabriel Cousens, and Richard Moss; and technical writer Thomas Wolfe, who evidently awakened Kundalini while using biofeedback equipment. A spiritual healer and psychic from new Mexico, Chris Griscom, has written of her profound spiritual and psychic experiences since early childhood, and Serrano as well mentions "feeling a strange chilling sensation that traveled along my spine and reached up to my brain" which occurred often at night when he was a child.[2] All of these writers provide us with insight into both spontaneous and disciplined approaches to awakening and moderating Kundalini and bring clarity and understanding to the possibilities and difficulties of this process. I found many of their experiences echoed in the cases of the Westerners I interviewed for this book.

Most teachers describe Kundalini awakening as essential to the spiritual process. However for some it is not defined as the ultimate experience but only a step in the right direction, usually the fifth step in a seven-step process. Aurobindo viewed Kundalini as the awakening of an "ascending current" of energy and said a "descending current" occurs when one is fully open to higher consciousness, which may eventually enable the consciousness of God to transform the condition of human life on this planet.

The following stories were selected from the writings and contributions of those saints, teachers and spiritual voyagers who have provided in-depth and detailed descriptions of personal experiences with Kundalini awakening. I recommend you return to their sources and read in more detail of the lives of these teachers and mystics for a deeper understanding of this process.

Part 1:
Self-Reports and Case Histories of Eastern Spiritual Teachers

Caitanya

A biography of Caitanya provides the earliest story I have found in the literature of Kundalini experiences endured by an Indian master.[3] Born in 1486, Caitanya was the founder of the last great Vaisnava sect in India, and his life and work coincided with the development of middle Bengali literature. His adult life was spent surrounded by writers and according to Mujumdar, who used many of these men as original sources to put together a biography of his life, 58 of his companions became more or less famous poets of this era.

Caitanya's mother had eight daughters who died before his older brother was born. His father reported 13 months before Caitanya's birth that he felt a divine light enter his head and he passed it on to his wife, who then had a vision of many gods worshipping her. After his birth he was found to have marks of a banner, thunder, conch shell, discus and fish on his feet. His grandfather, a famous astrologer, calculated from his horoscope and from his body that he had the 32 physical signs of a great man. It is said if he cried the only sound that would quiet him was the recitation of the name Hari. (This is a name of Krishna which means remover of sin.)

There are many tales about his charm, cleverness and misbehavior. He was restless and precocious and easily able to get what he wanted, but at times he fell into a rage, once hitting his mother so hard she fainted. He asked to hold flying birds, the stars, and the moon, and when he couldn't have them he had a tantrum. His unruliness grew when he started school and engaged with friends in fights and pranks all over the city, mocked other boys, threw and spat water at bathers in the Ganges or pulled their legs under water, poured water over the heads of meditators, took items of worship and food offerings from people who were bathing, and substituted the clothes of men and women bathers. He was often in trouble with the townspeople for these pranks, but they found it difficult to stay angry at him.

Throughout his youth he continued to have tantrums, and one time he broke everything in the house. The next day he gave his mother two gold pieces, the source of which was never accounted for. After this event he settled down and became an outstanding scholar. At age 16 he graduated and became a teacher in the home of a man who hired him to teach grammar to his son and other young students. He was charming and extremely handsome, and would frequently be followed by groups of students with whom he engaged in dialectic and philosophical arguments. During this period he once fell into a trance in which he "uttered unintelligible words, rolled on the ground, broke things, shouted very loudly, jumped and threatened to beat people, then became absolutely stiff..." When friends brought him oils, which they thought would calm him, he shouted: "My name is Visvambhar, because I uphold the world. I am He, but who recognizes me?"[4] Then he rushed toward his friends as if to attack them. Some thought he was possessed, but he soon recovered.

He married a beautiful young woman but early in the marriage, while he was out of town lecturing, she was bitten by a snake and died. Although he grieved intensely for her, he eventually remarried to another beautiful woman of a well-to-do family.

In 1508, Caitanya went to Gaya to perform prescribed rites at his father's grave and he met Isvar Puri, a spiritual teacher who initiated him and gave him a ten-syllable mantra. He meditated on the mantra and after a short time fell into an ecstatic state, lamenting loudly for Krishna. As he became more obsessed with the saint he decided to travel to Mathura to seek him. On his way there he heard a divine voice tell him it was not the time to go, and that he would someday dispense love and devotion throughout the world.

He returned home greatly changed. As he told a few friends what had happened he broke down and began to lament, crying the name of Krishna. The flow of spiritual love coming from him seemed overpowering to them. After this he frequently fell into ecstasies, begging for Krishna, at times falling or rolling on the ground. Bhakti, or devotional worship, was not yet a common practice in

India, but some worshipers, who had been patiently waiting for a savior, came to see Caitanya and proclaimed him as the answer to their prayers.

His ecstatic trances interfered with his teaching of grammar, where he would fall into lengthy discourses on the greatness of Krishna and the excellence of devotion to him, most of which the students did not understand. At times he fell to the ground, rolling, shaking and crying, and then did not recall it afterwards. Eventually he had to quit teaching because of the complaints.

He became meek, bowing and falling at the feet of the Vaisnanvas, a devout sect of worshippers he had previously mocked. He would wash their clothes and carry home items of worship they had brought. He advised them to perform kirtan (devotional singing and dance) so that Krishna himself would eventually come to them. He became furious and threatened to kill people who insulted the Vaisnanvas. He exclaimed at times "I am he! I am he". Sometimes he would climb a tree in his fervor and then suddenly jump down and fall on the ground with closed eyes. He ground his teeth with a horrible noise, somersaulted, and rolled on the ground. Many people thought he was mad. However a highly-regarded holy man, Scrivas, saw him and said he wasn't mad but suffered from "maha-bhakti-yoga" (great devotional union).[5]

A leading Vaisnanva had dreams and visions seeing Caitanya as his Lord and master and during initiation ceremonies so did Scrivas. Soon afterwards he began to gather large group of devotees, who saw him as an incarnation of Krishna. It appeared he could read people's minds, giving them what they wanted before they had voiced the desire. He was 24 years old, and many followers were much older, highly educated and trained scholars, yet they never wavered from their faith in him. Frequently people reported he appeared to them in the form of Visnu, holding a conch, discus, club and lotus in four arms. They would swoon, then fall at his feet in worship. Once he fell into a strange depression, feeling he did not possess love for God, and jumped into the Ganges to commit suicide. Two followers dragged him out.

After several months of instigating Krishna worship and devotions he had an encounter with some students which left them angry and wanting revenge. He felt the only way to redress this from the karmic position was to become a monk, whom no one hates and everyone respects, so that they would eventually fall at his feet. He gave up his family and possessions and became a samnyasin (a monk who takes a vow of poverty), and thereafter was angry if anyone compared him to a deity. He traveled broadly, meeting with scholars and leaders of spiritual groups and converting them to Krishna worship. He introduced the Hare Krishna chant for meditation, encouraged groups to sing it together, including families, and later the practice began of large groups singing it as they carried instruments and walked in the city.

The last 12 years of his life are said to have been spent in a mood of acute emotional distress. He followed a strict routine, waking before dark to go to the Jagganatha temple in Puri. Then he returned home and recited Krishna's name for several hours. He observed great austerity, lost all taste for food and ate little. He often spent the entire night in devotion or in trance. His health gradually broke down. At one point he cried that after union with Krishna he had lost him. "In his trance, he beamed with pleasure, but when he regained his normal senses, he felt as if he had lost his treasure, and sang and danced in fury." He was said to be possessed by ten forms of lovesickness day and night. One night he was found laying by the main temple gate, "his body stretched to about eight to nine feet in length, each arm and leg was about four feet in length of bare skin and bones; feet, neck and waist were hanging loose, held only by about six inches of taut skin. Not only was he unconscious, his breathing had stopped; foaming at the mouth, his eyes were fixed in a deadly stare." By shouting "Krishna" in his ear his friends brought him back to consciousness, and his body regained its normal state. He did not remember anything except that Krishna had appeared and vanished.[6]

He frequently fell into trance and a slight stimulus could make him exuberantly happy or terribly depressed. Once in an emotional fervor he rubbed his face so violently on the floor that blood began to flow.

Sources vary in their reports of his death but it was probably in 1533, at the age of 48, several days after contracting an infection, caused when a toe on his left foot was pierced by a falling brick during a festival in Puri.

Commentary

Although this biography does not specifically cite Kundalini, Caitanya exhibited many of the manifestations commonly associated with it. He went through a major personality change after his initiation, becoming meek, prayerful and devoted until he was totally obsessed with thoughts of Krishna, love and worship, and at some point identified himself with Krishna, exhibiting inflation, or possibly, in psychological terms, identification with an archetype.

He had increased compassion for others and great influence over them. He exhibited many physical symptoms such as shaking, falling down, rolling on the ground, running at rapid speeds, suspension of breath, falling into trance, unusual stretching and lengthening of the body, and difficulty or disinterest in eating. He also had dramatic mood swings, lack of interest in any worldly activities, and ecstatic visions. It is probably safe to comment that the outcome of his ecstatic experiences is not especially encouraging in terms of western psychology, for he seems to have lost the capacity to care for himself or his life in his singular obsession with God-consciousness. He became inflated and obsessed in the process. In India this kind of God-intoxication is accepted, and sometimes worshipped, for Caitanya is seen as one of India's greatest saints, an incarnation of Krishna himself. Lost in the experience of union with the One, he entered the world of the gods and became an archetypal symbol, holding a certain numinous quality and an inspiration for others, with no regard for issues of individuation or balance in the process. His emotional extremes became who he was, and it appears there was little developed sense of personal self to contain the great numinous aspects of his psyche. He simply became merged archetypally with the entity he adored.

Sri Anandamayi Ma

A more modern Indian mystic, Sri Anandamayi Ma, was born in the Indian village of Kheora on April 30, 1896. A biographer, Bhaiji, writes that both her parents led simple lives, devoted to God, and had kind and loving natures.[7] There were many learned pundits and devotees in the family. When she was a girl various "strange phenomena" (not specifically identified) became manifest in her body, much of which went unnoticed by others. Since she was so detached and unconcerned many people assumed she was retarded; often she couldn't say where she was nor what she had said a few minutes earlier. She talked to trees, plants and invisible beings, often relapsing in a mood of abstraction. She was married at age 12 to a brahmin of her village and she spent the next nine years in obscurity.[8]

From age 17 to 25 she fell into trances, her body stiff and numb, while chanting the names of gods and goddesses. At age 22, people reported they could see images of gods and goddesses flash out of her body as she recited mantras. At other times she would spontaneously perform various yogic postures (she never studied yoga). During one 15-month period she was unable to talk. After the ability to speak returned, she voluntarily continued silence for another 21 months. She performed spontaneous acts of worship and rituals (although she claimed to have no conscious desire to do so) and these were said to be exactly correct, again with no training. While doing this, she described herself as the worshipper, the worshipped and the act of worshipping. She later said "The personalities and forms of gods and goddesses are as real as your body and mine. They can be perceived with the inner vision opened up by purity, love and reverence." 9

Bhaiji wrote that the dominant tone of her mind during this period was "the natural expression of mantric symbolism and yogic practices", and later her quiescence and silence continued, "until a phase of intense peace and tranquillity became the all-pervading feature of her life."[10] Her appearance had a blissful glow. While living at Dacca at about age 27 her peacefulness began to attract devotees. "It is difficult to describe the ways by which their souls became steeped in tranquil bliss in her presence." [11]

She often went into trance during kirtan (singing and chanting of hymns). Once while placing vermilion on a lady's forehead she dropped the case, fell and rolled on the ground. Then she slowly rose and stood on her two big toes. Both hands were raised straight up, her head slightly tilted to one side and a little backwards, and her eyes stared radiantly towards the far end of the sky. She began moving and dancing as if filled with a heavenly presence until her body seemed to melt down on the floor and she rolled. Music come from her lips and tears flowed.

During kirtan she might bend her head backwards until it touched her back, twist her hands and feet in movements until she fell flat on the floor, where she would roll, perform stretching movements, and appear to expand in size or to shrink, while her breath seemed to stop. Her body might seem to be without bones, bouncing like a rubber ball, but her movements were as quick as lightning. The roots of her hair would swell, causing it to stand on end. Whenever a thought wave passed her mind, a corresponding physical expression swept over her whole body.

> In concord with her breath, her body was thrown into rhythmic surges like waves, and with its limbs stretched out it rolled on the ground in time to the music. Just as the fallen leaves of a tree roll on lightly, blown by the wind, so light and delicate were her movements. No human being, in spite of his best efforts could have imitated them. Everybody present felt that mother was dancing under the impact of heavenly forces, which moved her whole being in wavelike thrills.[12]

In private she went through a stage of spontaneously performing yoga asanas and mudras. Often with her breath seeming completely suspended, her hands, feet and neck would bend "with such a stiff twist that there seemed no possibility of them regaining their normal positions; a brilliant light flashed from her body illumining the space around her, then spreading, enveloping the universe. At these times she would cover up her whole body with a piece of cloth and retire to her solitary corner of the house."[13] During this period people who glanced at her might experience bliss, or if they touched her feet they could fall unconscious. Places she would lie or sit would become intensely heated. She would sit in one posture for hours, or fall silent in the midst of conversation. If left alone for several days in these states she felt neither hunger not thirst, and might forget how to talk or walk .

Ordinarily she ate very little, sometimes going days without even water, once passing five months with only a handful of food at night, and again spending five to six months eating a small quantity of rice only twice a week. During these times her appearance was bright and cheerful, her body healthy and vigorous. Later her eating habits became more restrained, and in 1924 she stopped eating with her own hands, taking three grains of boiled rice in the morning or evening. After she gave up eating rice altogether it appeared that she ceased to recognize it. Despite these rations she occasionally ate enormous quantities at a sitting. On one occasion she ate enough food for eight or nine persons; on another she ate rice-pudding prepared from about 40 pounds of milk, and asked for more. She said later that at these times she did not know she was swallowing so much food and would have eaten whatever was put before her.

It is written that "during samadhi her face lost all freshness of life; the body appeared to be very frail and weak and in her general appearance there was no expression whatever of either joy or pain."[14] In one five-day phase of samadhi there was no indication that she was alive or could ever become alive, her body being as cold as ice. When she recovered consciousness and was asked how she felt she said "It is a state beyond all conscious and supra-conscious planes -- a state of complete immobilization of all thoughts, emotions and activities, both physical and mental -- a state that transcends all the phases of life here below."[15]

Through her life she touched many people in dreams and visions, perhaps giving them a mantra and leaving flowers on their pillow. Her biographer said that she appeared before him often at noon in his office or at midnight in his bedroom, and he described experiences of psychic connection with her, such as knowing when he needed something, or granting his desires automatically.

Commentary

Although four hundred years later than Caitanya, Anandamayi Ma's ecstasies are very similar. She had a great impact on those who watched her moving, stretching and dancing in ways the body does not ordinarily move. She had long periods when she could neither talk nor move nor eat, lost in trance and ecstatic experiences. She performed many yoga movements spontaneously and seemed to know the teaching of classical yoga without any learning of it, as if it were simply given to her. She seemed to be completely motivated by compassion and love, saturated in peace and light, and the kinds of emotional turmoil sometimes associated with Kundalini are not recorded here. In fact she once said that the path of perfect love is identical with that of perfect knowledge, and that if one attains the final goal "exuberance, excessive emotion and the like cannot possibly occur. Emotional excitement and supreme Love are in no wise to be compared; they are totally different from each other."[16]

Evidently the ability to cope with every day survival needs was never an issue for Anandamayi Ma, who was well cared for by her husband and followers. Her nature seems always to have been quiet and introspective, tending toward peacefulness and silence, while Caitanya's was clearly more volatile from the beginning. She also brought forth and lived out an archetype of God-realization, showing no concern for personal interests, but her gentle nature allowed her to live a long and peaceful life, in which she effectively touched many others who sought spiritual direction in their lives.

Gopi Krishna

Gopi Krishna, a modern Indian who had great difficulty with his own Kundalini awakening, which occurred after intense but unsupervised meditation practice for many years, became a prolific writer offering many detailed descriptions and discussions of the Kundalini process. In Higher Consciousness he wrote about the mystical experience.

> Whether the experience is of a visionary type or unattended by visions and appearances, the most amazing feature lies in the alteration experienced in one's own personality and channels of observation. The observer finds himself transformed. He is no longer the puny, fear-ridden individual, unsure about the nature of his being and destiny. He either realizes himself as a widely stretched, floating mass of consciousness, released from the bondage

> of flesh, or he finds himself face to face with a celestial being, resplendent and sublime. Or he may see himself surrounded by a super-earthly scene of unequaled beauty and grandeur. In almost every case the vision is unlike anything experienced on earth in the ordinary course of life. This feature is so striking that it sharply divides mystical experience from anything seen in dreams or witnessed under drugs....[17]

> In the genuine mystical experience there is no distortion in perception, no riot of lights and colors, no unrealistic stimulation of emotions, no unprovoked laughter and no unrelated sentiments, but an inexpressible transformation of personality. The precision of the intellect and the accuracy of sensual images are never lost, distorted or blurred. On the contrary, the acuity of perception is heightened, the hues and colors become more clear and brilliant, the sounds more harmonious, and touch more sensitive.[18]

Krishna's personal experience of Kundalini is detailed in his autobiography, Kundalini, the Evolutionary Energy in Man. He wrote that he had practiced yoga from the ages of 17 to 34, seeking God-realization and feeling despair that nothing had happened, although he could keep the mind in a state of fixation for a long time and maintain mental absorption for long periods. While meditating and fully engrossed in contemplating the lotus one day he felt a strange sensation at the base of the spine, which extended upwards and grew in intensity until like the roar of a waterfall he felt "a stream of liquid light enter the brain through the spinal cord". The illumination grew brighter, the roaring louder, and he felt a rocking sensation and slipped out of his body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light. He felt as if he were growing wider, until he became "a vast circle of consciousness in which the body was but a point, bathed in light, in a state of exaltation and happiness impossible to describe."[19]

He could barely walk after this experience, felt a loss of appetite, mental confusion, and detachment from people. He plunged into a period of intense ups and downs, until eventually he lost all taste for work and conversation and became gravely ill. One night, while he was lying in bed, "a tongue of flame" sped across his spine and into the interior of his head. After this he felt a stream of "living light" rushing through the spinal cord into the cranium, gathering greater speed and volume at night. When he closed his eyes he saw luminous currents swirling in circles, moving rapidly from side to side. It was fascinating but it terrified him.

He began hearing roaring sounds, which increased in intensity as the days went by. He became anxious and exhausted, lost all appetite, his tongue was coated white and his eyes were red. His face became haggard and anxious, he had acute disturbances in digestive and excretory functions. As months passed he felt such things as energy leaping through the nerves of his body; cognition which seemed unstable and continually contracted or expanded; mood swings from elation into extreme depression, and bursting into tears unless he gagged his mouth; insomnia; lack of love for his family; and inability to eat. His food intake dropped to one or two glasses of milk and a few oranges each day. He burned inside and had great restlessness and his health deteriorated. He feared the supernatural and thought he had made a grave mistake. An ascetic told him he must not be experiencing Kundalini since that was always a blissful experience, so he had great doubts, thinking himself the victim of evil spirits. His panic grew. He said an "unearthly radiance" flooded his head continuously, often taking horrible shapes and forms in the dark of night.

Finally, after a particularly intense bout of pain and heat, he lay on his bed one night "burning in every fibre, lashed as it were by a fiery rain of red-hot needles piercing my skin. At this moment a fearful idea struck me. Could it be that I had aroused Kundalini through pingala, or the solar nerve which regulates the flow of heat in the body, and is located on the right side of sushumna?" [20] Lying in bed convinced he was dying, he decided to make a final effort and he put all his energy into forcing an imaginary cold current up the ida, the lunar nerve on the left side. He distinctly felt the nerve and strained to divert its flow into the central channel. "There was a sound like a nerve thread snapping and a silvery streak passed zigzag through the spinal cord, exactly like the sinuous movement of a white serpent in rapid flight, pouring an effulgent, cascading shower of brilliant vital energy into my brain, filling my head with a blissful luster in place of the flame that had been tormenting me for the last three hours."[21] He fell asleep in bliss and woke up an hour later with the luster still there, the burning sensation and fear nearly vanished. He began to eat in small amounts, and gradually returned to health, although he continued to obsess about his abnormal condition and feel uncertain about his future.

In future months he stabilized, and continued feeling heightened awareness of the senses, having inner vision where he saw the flow of vital currents, and experiencing a cranial "glow" that frequently drew his attention when he lay down to sleep. His body would shake as a current sent upward streams of a lustrous fluid, and he might feel at night raging energy from the genitals, abdominal and thoracic areas and the brain, with a roaring noise in the ears.

Eventually he turned toward meditation again, and became caught up in a "boundless ocean of unconditioned being", losing himself in an "amazing, immaterial universe." He became inflated with the thought he was a yogi. He became obsessive about this and unable to sleep. One night he felt his head reeling, his ears buzzing with a discordant noise and a wide column of fire mounting up and shooting out flames around his head. This initiated three months of torture along the lines of his initial experience, insomnia, and extreme physical weakness. He went through another stage of inability to eat, becoming very weak, until one night he had a dream about eating meat, and began a careful plan of moderating a diet he could tolerate, eating every three hours, until eventually he was well again. This time he threw himself into work, helping the community and becoming involved in meaningful social causes, avoiding the supernatural. He became stabilized for the next 12 years. At that time he began spontaneously writing poetry and had visions that reframed and restructured his consciousness, flooding him with ecstasy and verse. This led to the redirection of his life toward work as a spiritual teacher.

Commentary

In providing this first-person account Krishna offered many specifics on the interior experiences of Kundalini awakening, describing lights, energy, sensations, sounds, dreams and emotions in great detail. The reader can clearly sense the physical discomfort, fear, visions and fantasies that may accompany this process, along with the life changes ii instigates over a span of years. At first Krishna had great difficulty maintaining normal work and social functioning but later he became tireless in his contribution to the community and charitable efforts. He clearly described intense mood swings and self doubt, eating disorders, and symptoms of agonizing heat or pain in the body. The possibility of inner redemption, the voice from within or the dream with the right advice, is revealed in Krishna's story. It suggests one might benefit from paying close attention to such guidance.

His difficulties seemed to have been the result of having no spiritual teacher, being full of self-doubts and denial of the religious aspects of his experience, and a tendency to obsessive thinking. Two of the supportive factors in his life were a wife who cared for his physical needs although he evidently told her little about what was going on, and a brother with whom he shared his experiences. Each forward step of this process seemed to emerge from some deep intuition that appeared whenever he reached a stage of desperation. Like many people, he passed through several stages of this process, enduring a long gestation period before the experience stabilized.

Swami Muktananda

Many people I have met who report experiences with Kundalini once had at least a minimal encounter with Muktananda, who introduced them to the experience of Kundalini through shaktipat. In a series of magazines published by his organization many of his followers described conditions that appear to be Kundalini awakening and discussed changes in their personalities and lives.

Muktananda wrote several books that describe Kundalini awakening, and in Play of Consciousness (1978) told in considerable detail of his own process. In this autobiography he said he became a spiritual seeker when he left home at age 15 to become a wandering ascetic. He described his temperament as fiery, impatient, arrogant and demanding. After meeting his guru, Bhagavan Nityananda, he became totally devoted to him, and practiced deep meditations in which he was completely identified with him and experienced overwhelming bliss. He described the dramatic ups and downs associated with spiritual practices, ranging from rapturous bliss to flare-ups of anger and abusiveness. One night he spent the entire night doing a detailed meditation in which he spent hours identifying every part of his body with the guru's body, until concentrating on the heart he felt prana becoming steady there, and felt a stab of pain at the muladhara "like a bolt of divine lightning... A wave of prana ran throughout my body and throbbed in thousands of different nerves. I was lost in meditation."[22]

Shortly after this, Muktananda was initiated through a deep eye contact with the guru, and given the gift of his guru's sandals. He was told to go to a hut some distance from the ashram and meditate. There he began a series of intense experiences, suffering great pain and anguish. He was very restless, and his whole body ached as if every pore was pierced by needles. The ecstasy was gone. He had nightmares, and his peace of mind was destroyed. He was flooded with "hateful and sinful" thoughts. At one point his abdomen swelled with air after which he exhaled it with great force. Spontaneous yogic breaths or the stoppage of breath would occur.

One night he went out into the dark, his mind confused, certain he was going mad or dying. He wanted to dance, jump and shout. His limbs and body became very hot, and he ached all over. He saw the earth, sky and trees spinning. He stood up and sat down repeatedly. He saw images of his guru beneath the mango trees, and then the fields appeared to be on fire, with hoards of people screaming as if it were the end of the world. Creatures six to fifty feet tall danced naked before him with their mouths gaping open, screeching horribly. His body went into the lotus position and felt locked permanently in it. If he tried to close his eyes they would immediately open. Images of fires, ghosts and demons persisted. Then a moonlike, radiant white ball about four feet in diameter appeared. It struck against his eyes and then passed inside of him. He called this a "real" experience, not a dream. A second later the bright light of the sphere penetrated his body, his tongue curled up against the palate and his eyes closed. There was a dazzling light in his forehead and his head was forced down and glued to the ground.

After a while he saw a soft red light shimmering and flickering slightly, sending sparks through the universe, then slowly he came to body consciousness. He sat to meditate and felt pain in the muladhara and saw a light in the heart space. He made the sounds of a camel and the roar of a tiger, so loudly that villagers the next day thought a tiger had been loose in the fields. In the days to follow he had numerous experiences of energy in his body, saw the red light often, heard crackling and popping sounds in his body, felt great heat, had many conflicting emotions flooding him in meditation, and had intense mood swings.

As the experience deepened, the light became a steady red aura of his own size and shape that enveloped him inside and outside. Millions of tiny rays flashed in it, and as he watched he became completely absorbed. His body shook and swayed, performed yogic postures, hopped like a frog, and twisted and hissed like a snake. He visited other worlds, and felt tremendous ecstasy. Yoga mudras and asanas occurred spontaneously, along with loud cracking sounds in his head. His head would roll so vigorously that it would bend below his shoulders and he could see his back. Later he suffered from an intense sexual desire, although he had been celibate for years and had no interest in sex. Images of a naked woman pursued him. Ultimately these experiences subsided, and deeper levels of bliss along with positive integrative images emerged, especially that of a blue pearl holding a divine being within.

Muktananda later advised those dealing with Kundalini to trust in and obey the guru, understand and witness the inner process and surrender to the awakened shakti. He said "recognize and trust that whatever is happening is for the good...Do not be afraid -- let whatever is happening run its course."[23] In addition, a yogi should stay pure and chaste, talk little, have noble thoughts, love solitude, and seek the company of saints and good people. He also believed that "To realize God one must first love oneself, and not indulge thoughts of being wretched, sinful and worthless."[24] One should neither torture nor pamper the body, but see it as a temple of God, keeping it pure, clean, healthy. "Do not punish the mind by calling it impure, restless and unstable. If lovingly led to a proper place, to rest in the Self, it becomes tranquil." [25]

Commentary

Muktananda's story provides a clear picture of the inner turmoil and overwhelming energy sometimes accompanying Kundalini awakening, even under the guidance of a master teacher. He described experiences with lights, visions, movements, yogic postures, irrational moods, sounds, ecstatic bliss, and sexual energy with an intensity rare in this literature. He gives details of some specific images that commonly appear in this process: animals, fire, the destruction of the earth, demons, and the blue pearl. His Kundalini experiences were contained within a few years, and led to his lifetime of work as a guru and spiritual teacher.

If we accept his definition of his "fiery, impatient, arrogant and demanding" nature, we have the flavor of the kind of personality pattern he brought into the spiritual life, which may be a reason for the fiery and intensely expressive processes he encountered there. He also appears to have engaged and moved through this awakening fairly rapidly, under the direction of his guru, on which he had an intense and all-consuming projection of the Self. This is the Siddha Yoga path, using identification with the enlightened guru to burn away the sense of a personal self and experience the nature of Divine Self.

Swami Yogananda and Kriya Yoga

A less dramatic encounter with spiritual emergence seems to occur in the practice of Kriya Yoga, brought to the West in the 1920's by Paramahansa Yogananda, who taught it to thousands of people over a 30-year span, using a special set of exercises and breathing techniques that promote a gradual stimulation and progression of Kundalini energy. He called this the "Holy Science" and spoke of achieving continual bliss.

Yogananda emphasized the power of attention as a great director and discharger of energy, and described a controlled upward movement of prana through the chakras, accompanied by various sensations, which eventually, after prolonged practice, brings about a state of conscious bliss and peace. He defined this as the universal aim and highest necessity of life, because in it we are really conscious of God, or bliss, and feel the expansion of our real Selves. The more frequently this is experienced, the more personality or individuality falls away, and a state of universality is reached. He speaks of this merging as the true purpose and state of religion. Yogananda said kriya practice is accompanied from the beginning by feelings of peace, and soothing sensations along the spine. It slows down the respiratory rate, ultimately stilling the breath completely, which feeds the physical cells with "undecayable light" keeping them in a spiritually magnetized condition. He states that this prolongs life, frees the mind from preoccupation with the senses and enlarges consciousness.[26]

According to scriptures, wrote Yogananda, a person requires a million normal diseaseless years of evolution to perfect his human brain and experience cosmic consciousness. Kriya practice enables one to evolve much more rapidly because 1000 kriyas in 8 1/2 hours produces the equivalent of 1000 years of natural evolution, 365,000 years in one year. In three years a yogi can accomplish what nature brings to pass in a million years. But he warns that these practices can only be undertaken by well-developed yogis who have carefully prepared their body and brain to withstand the power generated by intensive practice; a beginner does the exercises only 14 to 24 times twice daily.[27]

Yogananda wrote the personable _Autobiography of a Yogi_ in 1945. In it he described childhood memories of previous incarnations, and great frustrations at being an infant in an impotent body. He had a strong emotional life that was felt in the words of many languages, and with difficulty he became accustomed to hearing his native Bengali. Born on Jan. 5, 1893, he was the fourth of eight children in a family that expressed mutual love, dignity, and tranquillity. His father was a mathematician. His mother was a strongly feeling woman, who gave so generously to the needy that one fortnight she distributed more than his father's monthly income. Both parents were followers of Lahira Mahasaya, and were initiated by him in Kriya Yoga. Although this guru died when Yogananda was an infant, he was part of his early childhood, with his picture on the meditation altar at home. He developed an inner relationship with him, frequently prayed to him, and at age eight experienced a healing of Asiatic cholera when he was nearly dead, by bowing internally to his picture. A blinding light enveloped his body and the entire room, and he was instantly well. Soon afterward he had a spiritual vision, where he saw in an immense flash of light a group of Himalayan yogis sitting in meditation postures in caves. As the image faded the light expanded in ever-widening circles to infinity and told him "I am Iswara (a Sanscrit name for the Lord, in his aspect as cosmic ruler), I am Light."[28]

During his youth Yogananda met many yogis, had visions and made unsuccessful attempts to get to the Himalayas. As a teenager he met his guru, Sri Yukteswar, also a disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya, who initiated him in Kriya Yoga. In this exchange he felt "a great light break upon my being, like the glory of countless suns playing together. A flood of ineffable bliss overwhelmed my heart to an innermost core."[29] He described many experiences with lights and visions such as closing his eyes and seeing flashes of lightning --"the vast space within was a chamber of molten light."[30] When he opened them the dazzling radiance continued outside. Later he learned to experience this light at will. He also had many visions of Divine Mother after his meeting with Yukteswar.

Once when Yukteswar lightly slapped his chest he plunged into a deep silence, and all the world in the streets around became silent. He saw scenes in all directions simultaneously, and fell into ecstasy. When slapped again he came out of it. A similar vision occurred at Dakshineswar Temple years later, when after meditating for five hours, he stood in the temple grounds and saw the goddess Kali and the temple appear in magnificent size, and his vision enlarge so he could see clearly for several miles down the length of the river and into the town. The walls of buildings glimmered transparently. Everything was bathed in white, blue and rainbow hues.

Yogananda had many inner messages, such as precognitive information regarding the death of family members, and visions of coming to the U.S., seeing the centers he would establish later in life. He often experienced synchronistic events, which assisted him in such areas as passing exams to graduate from college, and having funds when needed for various reasons. In 1920 he arrived in Boston, and began a tour of hundreds of cities where he taught the largest yoga classes in the world (at that time). During 32 years he initiated 100,000 students, and established the Self-Realization Fellowship with centers in Los Angeles and Encinitas, California. He died following a lecture in Los Angeles on March 7, 1952, and was said to leave his body consciously, in the ancient yogic tradition.

Swami Sivananda (1969), who has also written several volumes on spiritual awakening, described the outcome of Kundalini awakening in an American man he met with who was swept into "cosmic consciousness" while hearing a talk by Yogananda. He said he felt indescribable ecstasy, bliss, immortality, eternity, truth, and divine love which became the core of his being and the essence of his life. Afterwards, he experienced physiological changes, the most unusual of which felt like a rearrangement of molecular structure in his brain. It seemed as if this continued ceaselessly, like a drill boring out thought channels. Sometimes he felt superhuman strength, as if he were carrying the world on his shoulders. During the months of his illumination he felt no need of food or sleep, and he awakened to a joy past all power of description. He had previously suffered from heavy colds and been a constant smoker but now the body was purged of illness and the desire for cigarettes was gone, and he went about his daily work with enhanced efficiency and speed.[31]

Commentary

Yogananda's biography is flavored with the charm of an Indian folk-tale, full of miracles, healings and visions that are recounted as natural and every-day occurrences. He reports none of the negative experiences of Kundalini, and seems from early childhood to be gifted with faith, love and psychic gifts. His relationship with his guru is in the classic Indian tradition, receiving shaktipat, insight, yoga practices, personal assistance, and lessons about life. He never emphasized Kundalini in his writing, and awakening seems to be a more subtle movement of consciousness and vision than we find in most other yogic literature. Since Kriya Yoga is said to be revived from ancient times, this path may be a secret process used by the earliest teachers, long before concerns about the materialistic age and the body ushered in hatha yoga and tantric practices. However, kriya yogis often practice energization exercises similar to yoga asana, and the kriya practice is essentially one of moving pranic energy up and down the spine in order to awaken the chakras and Kundalini. Yogananda said that kriya practices bring about complete control of the electrical flow in the body, causing only an attractive sensation at the beginning, and ultimately bringing a state of conscious bliss which counteracts the exciting state of normal body consciousness. Eventually they cause individuality to fall away and a direct communion with God to be attained.

A number of centers in the United States and India, several of them established by former initiates of Yogananda, continue to teach Kriya Yoga. A few people I have spoken with who practice it do not report the kinds of discomfort or disruptive energy releases common to other kinds of Kundalini awakening, although they do report experiences of bliss, inner tranquillity, light, joy and orientation of their lives toward spiritual concerns.

Krishnamurti

Krishnamurti is unique among spiritual teachers both in his personal history and his role in both eastern and western cultures. The eighth son born to an orthodox Brahmin family in 1895, his early rearing included learning traditional Hindu scriptures. He was a child given to daydreaming, occasionally experiencing visions of the gods, or psychic awareness, and not much interested in academics. When he was ten years old he was seen on the beach by C.W. Leadbeater, who noticed an intense aura around him. Leadbeater and Annie Besant decided he would be the prophesied great world teacher, and took him into the Theosophical Society, a movement based on the tenets of a universal brotherhood of humanity, which studied ancient wisdom and explored spiritual mysteries, psychic phenomenon, and subtle body energies. His father was persuaded to allow Krishnamurti and his younger brother, Nityananda, to live with Leadbeater and other Theosophists, in order to be trained and initiated into sacred mysteries and to be educated in western ways. Twenty years later, after awakening, Krishnamurti renounced the value of attachment to any organization and to the dismay of those who had hoped he would be their new leader, disbanded the organization's Order of the Star, of which he was president, at a public gathering.

Krishnamurti taught and wrote as an independent teacher, never calling himself a guru. He didn't promote yoga techniques, although he practiced pranayama, hatha yoga and meditation, nor did he write much of Kundalini. But two biographies of his life provide a description of his own intense awakening, occurring primarily in 1922 while living in Ojai, California, as witnessed by his brother Nitya and Rosalind Williams, a young American theosophist, who were both with him at the time.[32] The most painful and dramatic experiences lasted from August 1922 through 1924, and his spiritual process was deeply impacted by the death of his brother in 1925. By 1927 he seemed complete in this awakening, although deeper levels of it continued through his life, and he later stated it was not complete until 1948. In 1927 he wrote to Leadbeater: "I know my destiny and my work. I know with certainty that I am blending into the consciousness of the one Teacher and that he will completely fill me. I feel and I know also that my cup is nearly full to the brim and that it will overflow soon. Till then I must abide quietly and with eager patience."[33]

Some of the phenomenon reported in Jayakar's biography (1986) related to his Kundalini awakening are:

-- Acute pain at the nape of the neck, increasing for two days until he could not think, was unable to do anything, and was forced to bed. There he became almost unconscious, although aware of what was happening around him. During this time he saw a vision of a man mending the road, who was himself, holding a pickax which was also himself, breaking the stone which was himself. He felt himself identified with every element of the scene, including grass, trees, and a car driving by, being in everything, or "rather everything was in me, inanimate and animate, the mountain, the worm and all breathing things. All day long I remained in this happy condition. I could not eat anything, and again at around six I began to lose my physical body...."[34]

-- The following day he could not tolerate the vibrations of other people in the room, felt much worse, and was weak and tired, weeping from exhaustion and lack of physical control. His head felt as though many needles were being driven in. He imagined his bed was filthy, and he begged to go to the woods in India. Later, at the urging of his companions, he went outside and meditated under a pepper tree, felt himself go out of his body and saw himself meditating. Over his body was a star, and he felt the vibration of the Lord Buddha and beheld Lord Maitreya and Master K.H. (two Theosophical Society spiritual guides). He felt happy, and at peace, and that nothing could disturb the calmness of his soul. "Love in all its glory has intoxicated my heart; my heart can never be closed. I have drunk at the fountain of joy and eternal Beauty. I am God-intoxicated."[35]

-- For the next ten days he was calm, and then sensation in his spine and periods of acute pain began in the evenings, following meditation, and lasted for two or three hours. He would lie down on a couch in a semi-conscious state, moan and complain of a great heat, shudder a little and collapse. When he regained full consciousness he did not remember what had occurred although he felt a vague general discomfort.

-- He would experience extreme sensitivity and could not bear light, sounds and touch; he would appear conscious but then stumble and fall down. Sometimes he would sit up on the bed and murmur something, then fall backward or forward. He would groan and toss about murmuring, and complaining of pain in his spine.

-- He would call for his mother who was deceased, talk with her, and relive early childhood experiences. Between spasms of pain he would converse with an unseen presence, who appeared to be a friend and a teacher.

-- His pain became more intense, as if his body was an open wound. It seemed to move to a new part of the body unaccustomed to the terrible heat. He would speak, sob, shriek with pain and beg for a moment's respite. His caretakers noticed two voices, one they called the Physical Elemental, the body, and the other Krishnamurti's natural voice.

-- One night when the pain was terrible he began running at full speed, until his caretakers held him back, afraid he would be hurt. He tried several times to run from the pain. His body would contort in dangerous and awkward positions.

-- On one occasion he felt someone was sneaking around the house, and went to a low-surrounding wall and told them loudly to go away. Then he lay down and started calling out "Please come back Krishna."[36]

-- For several days the pain shifted to his face and eyes, and he felt his eyes were gone, and sobbed and moaned.

-- He saw visions of great beings, and his companions also felt the presence of energy and unknown guides and masters in the room. It was as if these beings were conducting or supervising the process.

-- One night he was heard to fall, and then to state he was sorry, that he knew he must not fall, he was to make no movement , so he clasped his fingers tightly and lay with them under his back, while the pain continued. It was so terrible that it was difficult to breathe, and he choked repeatedly and fainted three times. He seemed to be enduring a very difficult initiation, and later he acted as if he was aware of a roomful of people pleased with his success in completing it.[37]

Gradually the intensity of these episodes decreased and he regained his physical strength. He frequently left his body, or had visions of masters and saints. One night he had an experience that was recorded by his brother as "the current starting as usual at the base of his spine and reaching the base of his neck, then one went on the left side, the other on the right side of his head and they eventually met at the centre of the forehead; when they met a flame played out of his forehead". Nitya felt this could relate to the opening of the third eye.[38]

In later years Krishnamurti wrote in letters of an ecstasy that never left him, "I am full of something tremendous. I can't tell you in words what is like a bubbling joy, a living silence, an intense awareness like a living flame."[39] He later reported capacities for clairvoyance and healing. He did healing infrequently, not wanting to be known as a healer, and he felt an antipathy to clairvoyance, calling it an intrusion of privacy.

Commentary

Krishnamurti did not put much focus on these experiences during his later years of teaching. His emphasis was on awareness, conscious living, mastery of thought and responsibility for the planet. Although the Kundalini process represented a pivotal point in his own awakening it does not seem that he regarded this as a process that ought to be encouraged, or for which one could train; nor did he have any inclination to pass along shakti to others, although he did occasionally do healing. His experiences provide us with another example of the intensity of this process, and of the need to recognize that there are powers at work here that appear to operate with a schedule and plan, over which the therapist/ doctor/ friends/ companions can have little influence other than to offer emotional support, physical care and protection. He was always adamant that two people stay with him while he was in these processes, even if they couldn't communicate with him. Ultimately the individual is faced with enduring the encounter alone, and ultimately the experience seems to lead to bliss, joy and a sense of universal compassion.

B. S. Goel

The biographical account of a much lesser known Indian, B.S. Goel, offers detailed descriptions of a Kundalini awakening which occurred from 1975 to 1985, disrupting and gradually reshaping the mind and lifestyle of an Indian intellectual who had studied Freudian psychology.[40] Goel describes himself as a member of a deeply religious family but with no sign of religious interests as a young child. He was introduced to hatha yoga as a teenager, and in a few days could perform all the asanas automatically. He practiced yoga and pranayama through college, also studied Marxism and Freudian psychology, all to overcome what he labeled a deep inferiority complex.

At age 29, during his doctoral studies, he was discussing Marx with a friend one day when a great force rushed up his spine to the crown of his head and he was plunged into ecstasy. Soon afterward he began spontaneously writing poetry in English, something he had never dreamed of doing before. He had never even enjoyed poetry. This initial experience was followed by severe depression, and Goel saw a psychiatrist who said he had paranoid tendencies and religious delusions. In time he met a swami who taught him to meditate, and he entered Freudian psychoanalysis. The meditation produced beneficial waves of joy and peace, and taught him to observe himself and his mental behavior. He felt a compulsion to meditate frequently. Although the analyst was against all meditation and considered it a compulsion formation in him, he continued both processes and felt they were helpful, eventually writing a book on psychological analysis and meditation. The Indian guru Sai Baba appeared to Goel in dreams, and later during meditations and in visions, providing guidance for his process, although Goel had never met him.

After ten years of meditation, at age 39, Goel underwent what appears to be a major Kundalini opening. This was possibly triggered by the suicide of a friend. Staying the night at the friend's flat he felt depressed, and clearly with inner vision "saw that the two nerves laying just under the point where Hindus keep a lock of hair had slipped from their place making a fine downward movement."[41] He felt a nervous breakdown was taking place and that he was doomed forever. He became desperately depressed and tried to use psychoanalysis to pull himself together. He prayed intensely to Sai Baba and increased his daily meditation. Eight days later, while he was sleeping, someone pulled off his blanket. He opened his eyes and saw the form of Sai Baba. He tried to touch him and when he could not he decided it was an hallucination and turned over to go back to sleep. The blanket was again pulled off and Sai Baba made him sit up and asked him to meditate, focusing on the mid-point between the eyebrows. He sat in meditations from 1:30 to 4 a.m.

The next day, while doing the same meditation, he saw a thick, vertical red line appear at the mid-point between the eye-brows. He became very calm and the depression left him. Two days later as he concentrated the red line reappeared and became an exact eye. Sai Baba stood in the middle of it with a shiva-linga (an oval or phallic-like symbol) caught between his thumb and fingers of the right hand. Two days later the third eye opened and Sai Baba and he were both in it. He felt he received the full protection of Sai Baba and "experienced death". Soon afterwards he felt Kundalini rise in his backbone and move upward in the form of a cobra. A few days later he saw in the third eye Lord Krishna, Jesus Christ, and a five-headed cobra projecting some illuminating substance.

Goel says it is through the third eye that the grace of the guru descends, and this automatically breaks the center of ego, plunging one into such difficult stages he feels he will either go mad or die. Years of emotional and physical upheaval followed this opening for Goel, highlighted by numerous visions, particularly of the inner movement of Kundalini through the body. He wrote that in this process dark periods of depression were substituted abruptly with periods of great relaxation, which is why he did not break down completely.

Some of the symptoms he describes are uncontrollable weeping; seeing inner colors and visions; automatically repeating Om; his attention being riveted on the third eye from which streamed a powerful beam of crimson light; the loss of ability to engage in interpersonal relationships and all motivating force for work; and at one point an irrational infatuation with the daughter of a friend, on which he projected the goddess Kundalini. Psychological problems which he believes might have been diagnosed included confusion and bewilderment; anxiety neurosis with reactive depression; paranoia with religious delusions; God complex; auditory and visual hallucination; manic-depression; drowsy states; insomnia, extreme restlessness and delirium. He attempted the use of medication, suggestive therapy and catharsis with his brother, and self-analysis, none of which he felt had any impact.

Five years into this process he had what he thought was a severe heart attack two nights in a row. He felt surrendered to the possibility of dying, and continued meditating and concentrating on the third eye. His attention slipped to the heart center, and he saw a vision of Lord Krishna there, which immediately put him into a state of happiness and confidence. Later he concluded that the various chakras are pierced by the guru through this process, and the journey is often marked by great happiness emerging in between two bouts of suffering.

Commentary

Goel, who in 1982 established an ashram in India, has elaborately documented his progressive experience of growing awareness and wisdom, and the many upheavals which accompany it. It appears that the suffering of this process is behind him, and the direction of his life is set, but there is a strong sense in his work of the ever-expanding development of spiritual awareness, so that images, dreams, energy and bliss may continue to bring him to deeper levels of evolution. I recorded his experiences at some length because they reflect some unique aspects which mirror the experiences of some of my subjects. Some of these include inner vision, emotional upheavals, symptoms similar to those of a heart attack, egoic problems, bliss, writing poetry, and the appearance of a guru, Sai Baba, with whom he had no previous relationship. He offers interesting insight into the kinds of psychological problems that one experiencing Kundalini may be confronted with.

Goel's situation is also of note because he had what appears to be a spontaneous awakening, rarely described in the literature, following only short-term hatha yoga practices, at a time in life when his interests were not spiritual but more inclined toward Freudian psychology and Marxism. Yogic tradition would assert that his instant mastery of asana and spiritual awakening were the result of his spiritual efforts in previous lives. His path is similar to others, however, in the long-term progression, bringing a variety of experiences and insights over many years.

Part 2: Self-Reports of Westerners Who Followed Eastern Spiritual Traditions

Irina Tweedie

A remarkable biographical account of spiritual awakening under the tutelage of a yogic master, Bhai Sahib, has been written by Irina Tweedie (Daughter of Fire, 1986), a European woman born in Russia and educated in Vienna and Paris. This is an expanded version of an earlier biography, Chasm of Fire (1979). Following World War 2 Tweedie married an English naval officer, whose death in 1954 led her toward a spiritual quest. When she went to India, at the age of 52, she knew little of yoga, although she had been a Theosophist for seven years.

Her teacher defined his method (which he called a Sufi approach although it bears little resemblance to the Islamic Sufi tradition) as representing complete freedom. The disciple is never forced, but once surrendered to the guru, the guru initiates many processes. There are two ways open -- "the path of Dhyana, the slow, and easier way; or the path of Tyaga (complete renunciation), the Road of Fire, the burning away of all the dross, and it is the Guide who has to decide which way is the best suited in each individual case."[42] The former path is for the many, and the latter for only a few. Once the disciple is committed there is no free will for awhile.

Tweedie's guru describes awakening Kundalini while on this path as much less troubling than in hatha yoga, since the opening is gentle and is initiated at the heart chakra. He acknowledges he is not much help with someone who has awakened Kundalini through hatha practices -- it is in the hands of God. "When awakened by hatha yoga it becomes a great problem. It is a difficult way. One has to know how to take it up and take it down again through all the chakras, and it is troublesome. But with us we begin to notice it only when it reaches the heart chakra; it means peace, bliss, states of expanded consciousness. We awaken the king, the heart chakra, and leave it to the king to activate all the other chakras."[43]

Tweedie is told no effort must be made other than to sit with the guru, who does not make conditions, and cares for and loves the disciple like a loving mother.

This emphasis on the lack of practices, and on the heart chakra, offers insight into some of the variations of Kundalini opening, and suggests one possible reason why some people seem to have an easier process than others, possibly because their heart chakra is opened initially, or has been active and open before the advent of Kundalini. Although in this tradition, it is the presence and action of the guru that initiates all of the activity.

Although Tweedie is told her process will not be so difficult, she does endure some remarkably challenging episodes during her months with this teacher. She provides one of the more dramatic descriptions in the literature of sexual energy as it can erupt with Kundalini awakening. It began as she lay in bed, and felt a vibration, and heard a sound she had never before, like a soft hiss in the lower part of her abdomen. Suddenly she was flooded with powerful sexual desire, with no object in particular, an uncontrollable, wild, cosmic force that felt like insanity. It made her hair stand up on end as if filled with electricity. It was not a desire to have intercourse but an "overwhelming animal-like craving" that made her shake and bite her pillow so she would not howl. Her body was stiff and full of pain and her mind completely void except for fear. This went on for hours. It left her "shaking like a leaf, a mute, helpless, trembling jelly, carried away by forces beyond any human control." [44]

In the morning she was shaky and weak, but the energy had passed. However the following night it was worse, as along with the desire and energy she saw strange hideous shapes and beings, leering and obscene, having sexual orgies, and doing horrible sexual things she had never before heard of or imagined. She was terrified of the hallucinations and felt she was losing her mind. In the morning she was again shaky and weak, and full of shame. This continued the following night. Her guru advised her to control what was happening, which she did somewhat by lying completely stiff, pulling in the muscles of her lower body, trying to control the mind not to run away with imaginings. In this position she experienced:

> burning currents of fire inside, cold shivers running outside, wave after wave, over legs, arms, abdomen, and the back, along the spine, making all the hair rise over the body. It is as if the whole frame is full of electricity. Gradually, all the muscles of the thighs and the tummy begin to ache with tension. But this pain, gradually increasing my prolonged effort, somehow helps to relieve the desire. The ghastly shapes are here, sometimes clearly visible, sometimes indistinct. Strangely, I am getting used to them.[45]

The struggle between the opposites is also documented in Tweedie's book. She is told this friction is necessary to cause the suffering that will defeat the mind. "The greatest obstacle on the spiritual path is to make people understand that they have to give up everything." This is why every order of the guru must be obeyed, even should the guru ask one to deliver to him his wife or his child -- if not, the aspirant cannot survive. Whatever is dearest must go. "This is the Law. One cannot serve two Masters. Either the world or the Guru. Everything has to be given up, absolutely; nothing should remain, nothing at all. Even the self-respect has to go. Only then, and then only, can I take them into my heart."[46]

Tweedie's path is also unique because of the interest the guru has in her dreams, and her book offers many dreams and interpretations. Bhai Sahib taught that much of a follower's karma is acted out and released through dreams, once Kundalini is awakened, and experiences felt and suffered in dreams are thereby avoided on the earth plane, thus speeding up the karmic process.

This work is a powerful exposition of the daily rigors of the spiritual life, even when focused on love, and under the guidance of a master. It shows the nature of guru-disciple relationship, the intensity of sexual energy as it sometimes emerges in this process, and the austerities required when seeking spiritual transformation.

Commentary

Tweedie's biography indicates the rapid path of spiritual awakening available even to Westerners once a commitment is made, and details the kinds of energetic phenomenon, visions, and ego issues that are sometimes aroused in the company of a spiritual teacher. She courageously shares the trauma of her sexual energy and imagery. After less than a year with her teacher she was sent to London, with no money, to begin a new life on her own. She has since become a spiritual guide for many, who come to her inspired by her books and her teachings.

Kennett Roshi: A Zen Buddhist Perspective

An interesting series of autobiographical books has been written by Kennett Roshi, a Westerner who experienced kensho (enlightenment or God-realization) in a Buddhist monastery and later founded Shasta Abbey, in California. Two of her books are of special interest to the study of Kundalini, one an autobiographical account of a deep healing and spiritual transformation that she underwent over several months, following medical advice that she was going to die shortly of heart failure; the other an in-depth description of ancient methods useful in helping people balance their energy. In her biography How To Grow a Lotus Blossom (1977) she described experiences and visions similar to the yogic tradition, sharing in a style radically different from traditional Zen teachers who keep such stories secret.

Kennett sees enlightenment as an on-going flow, rather than occurring in stages, beginning with a first kensho (enlightenment experience) which Zen Buddhists call the "great flash of deep understanding" or "Penetration of Heaven".[47] On-going growth following this experience is subtle and tends not to be experienced as a particular event, although there are small moments of kensho that "make one dance" and are signs of development. In many ways she feels the most difficult time for aspirants is between the first and third kensho because temptations are far greater and more subtle. In order to progress one must not only keep passions rooted out, but clean up traces of them remaining from both this and previous lives. Kennett describes the third kensho as containing all the elements of the first, but the first occurs in a flash, like a lightning bolt, and the third is experienced much more slowly and deliberately with time to comprehend each step of the way. For example "the opposites are each looked at slowly and dispassionately and then deliberately discarded; the first kensho is a swift comprehension of grace; the third kensho starts as a deliberate act of will."[48]

Kennett advises that it is not good to do deep meditation and training alone, or to be in a place where one can be disturbed. She wrote "When advanced spiritual development is reached the world seems to treble and quadruple its efforts to distract and dishearten...and it is then that faith in the memory of the first kensho is absolutely vital; one second of doubt, even the possibility of thinking of the possibility of doubting, can cause the spirit to despair and death is the result. True meditation is not for cowards; it is hazardous, perilous and magnificent. For this reason a place of absolute peace and quiet is necessary. You will also need a friend or a disciple who is perfectly willing to go to any lengths to keep the world from bothering you." [49]

She believes all people can have these experiences, and the stages are always the same, but that each person sees and experiences kensho somewhat differently. She warns that no one should pursue these studies only for the sake of having such experiences. In her personal story she identifies 43 stages in movement toward her third kensho, the process beginning when she was extremely ill and close to death, and began 12 days of meditation. The experiences of the following months are expressed in vivid images depicting her difficulties, decisions, options, opposites and expanded awareness.

In the first stage she saw two roads, representing options in the world, and chose not to take either but to forge ahead, seeing nothing but a great mountain range with a face as sheer as glass before her. With determination, by refusing to consider any inadequacy, limitation, distraction or fear she moved straight up to the top. From this vantage point she saw the hopelessness and despair in the lives of those who stay on ordinary paths, but she was faced with a vast unknown, and soon a vast darkness. She continually moved on, reminding herself that "nothing matters" and remembering her first kensho experience. She realized she had to put right every wrong act she ever committed.[50]

In subsequent experiences, framed by the images of a great abyss of darkness, or the brilliance of lights which she must also pass by, she continued on in the process to question her purpose for living, to root out the deepest meanings of each of the Buddhist Precepts, and to view many past lives and resolve karma remaining from them through communication with those aspects of herself. Finally, her physical illness passed, and she began to recover.

Commentary

Kennett's story depicts in detail her inner visions and awareness, and suggests how the expansion of consciousness may be accomplished with visions. Her descriptions echo yogic descriptions of light and energy and scriptural descriptions of samadhi.

In addition to describing the kinds of visual imagery that may accompany spiritual growth, she outlines specific tasks in the process such as reconciling past wrongs, reviewing past lives, letting go of attachments and temptations, holding to the goal by remembering past experiences, and penetrating deeply into the experience and meaning of image and scripture. Such experiences are rarely, if ever, recorded in Zen literature, which generally views visions and body sensations as "makyo" or distracting delusions. Her vivid images demonstrate the deepest experience of the intuitive and visual function in this experience. It is also notable that she entered this process on the verge of dying and experienced remarkable healing in the midst of it, and that a key part of this process was that a trusted monk be with her at all times.

Motoyama: Japanese Parapsychologist and Yogi

Motoyama, author of Theories of the Chakras: Bridge to Higher Consciousness (1981) was introduced to spiritual practice at an early age, taken to temples and shrines, and taught to chant Buddhist Sutras and Shinto prayers at the age of four. He would chant with his mother and foster mother for hours at a time. He writes that he was told about and experienced the existence of non-human entities who reside in higher dimensions (he does not describe these).

At age 25 he began doing yoga daily, beginning with asanas at 3 a.m. and sitting for three or four hours, doing pranayama and concentration on specific chakras. His body and mind soon began to fill with an extraordinary amount of energy, and his physical and psychological states gradually changed. Within six months problems he had previously had with his stomach and ears disappeared, and nervousness ceased. Later he felt some new sensations:

> I had an itchy feeling at the coccyx, a tingling feeling on the forehead and at the top of the head, and a feverish sensation in the lower abdomen. I could hear a sound something like the buzzing of bees around the coccyx. In ordinary daily life my sense of smell became so sensitive that I could not endure offensive odors.[51]

These conditions continued for two or three months. Then while doing pranayama one day he felt around the svadhisthana chakra a "feverish" feeling like a mixture of ice and fire accompanied by a vision of white steam. A month or two later he saw a round, crimson fireball in his abdomen. At this time he began to have prophetic dreams and ESP experiences and to realize the spontaneous fulfillment of wishes. He became highly sensitive, physically and mentally, so that the smallest noise in meditation startled him. His emotions became unstable and he was easily excited. He states that this chakra is thought to control the genito-urinary system and the adrenal glands, and is connected to the kidney, urinary, bladder and triple heater meridians of acupressure. He believes abnormalities in these meridians may indicate increased activity of the svadhisthana chakra. When tested he had a distinct abnormality in the kidney and urinary bladder meridians, although no malfunction was present.

A few months later, when he was meditating before the altar, he felt particularly feverish in the lower abdomen and "saw there a round blackish-red light like a ball of fire about to explode in the midst of a white vapor. Suddenly, an incredible power rushed through my spine to the top of the head and, though it lasted only a second or two, my body levitated off the floor a few centimeters. I was terrified. My whole body was burning, and a severe headache prevented me from doing anything all day. The feverish state continued for two or three days. I felt as if my head would explode with energy. Hitting myself around the 'Brahman Gate' at the top of the head was the only thing that brought relief."[52]

As he continued his yoga practice, long-term problems with indigestion and gastroenteritis improved, and a new series of abdominal sensations began. He often saw "reddish light center on the naval that would become intensely white, seemingly much brighter than the sun. I grew dizzy and could see nothing for about ten minutes. I began to see a purple light shining between my eyebrows or in my abdomen."[53] He saw ghosts and spirits, some of whom he helped with prayers, some who made him feel peaceful and others who influenced him negatively and made him emotionally unstable. He would become ill or get angry for no reason, and once stayed in bed with a fever for a week. He experienced enhanced ESP abilities such as clairvoyance, telepathy, and spiritual insight.

During this period, while playing a game similar to the use of the Ouija Board with an old man, he fell into a semi-trance. His body felt like it was on fire and began to sweat profusely, his right hand began moving violently. Then he plunged into the extrasensory vision of a man in ancient times who was a tribal leader, and wanted to guide him through a place where he had lived in a former life. The following day while bicycling he discovered the place the guide had shown him in the trance.

Two years into this process, Motoyama began to notice a pain between the nipples of the chest crossing the midsternal line, and he felt as if his heart was functioning abnormally. One early morning while practicing water asceticism (pouring ice water over his naked body) he saw heat rising from the coccyx to his heart through the spine. His chest felt hot and his heart was a brilliant gold. The energy moved upward from the heart to the top of the head, becoming shining white. It left the body through the top of his head and rose into a higher dimension. He was aware of his physical body standing in the cold while his consciousness was in the heights worshipping the divine. His mother, who was watching, said she had seen a golden light shining at the top of his head and at his heart. He believes this was the opening of the anahata chakra. After this he began doing psychic healing, he developed an attitude of non-attachment to worldly things, and he felt a constant optimism about everything, being internally peaceful and free.

Opening of the visuddha chakra occurred four or five years later, after he began concentrating on it during pranayama exercises. Soon an irritation developed in the throat and breathing became difficult. After several months, he saw a dark purple light spread around his head. Consciousness of his body vanished, he became quiet and calm, and experienced a state of nothingness. Later he experienced a terrifying void, and felt such fear he wanted to give up yoga, and for awhile he saw a horrible devil-like being.

In time he overcame the fear and he could enjoy the total silence and peace, work freely in the world with no attachment to results, and see the past, present and future in the same dimension. He became able to see the past, present and future lives of others. His hearing improved although he had tympanitis in both ears since a child, and one eardrum and the bones of the left ear had been surgically removed.

The initial awakening of the ajna chakra began after focusing on it an hour a day for several months, concentrating on Om. His lower abdomen became as hard as iron, and his respiration became nearly imperceptible. It felt as if the upper half of his body had disappeared. Ajna chakra vibrated and he was immersed in a dark purple light while a bright white light shone from between his eyebrows. He heard a voice call as if it were echoing in a valley. He was filled with ecstasy and a divine symbol of power was revealed to him. He then fell into a deep calm and experienced a state of widened and deepened consciousness, seeing past, present and future.

The crown chakra, the sahasrara, awakened while doing a Taoist practice called Shoshuten, the circulation of energy in the upper body. He had inner sight of the sahasrara and two or three other chakras shining, and began to see a golden light enter and leave his body through the top of his head, which seemed to extend ten to twenty centimeters upward. He saw a vision of the head of Buddha, shining blue and purple, resting on his own head. A golden-white light flowed in and out through the Buddha's crown. He heard a powerful but tender voice, and realized his mission, his previous lives, his own spiritual state and many other things.

Commentary

This biography echoes many of the conditions of previous stories including awareness of energy, light, inner vision of the body, visions of the Buddha and other entities, psychic abilities, fears about the practices, out-of-body experience, awareness of a past life, and feelings of ecstasy. It is unique in its careful exploration of experiences related to each of the chakras. Many of these experiences are found elsewhere in the literature but not with such specific correlation. Motoyama does not mention working with a spiritual teacher, other than his mother, who he says had experienced some similar openings, and who sometimes was with him during these experiences. However he followed strict disciplines and austerities, and meditated very consistently for long hours prior to and during this time of his awakening

Da Free John: A Western Teacher

Born Franklin Albert Jones (Nov. 3, 1939) in Jamaica, New York, Da Free John, is a unique phenomenon in the West, an American who has encountered extensive spontaneous spiritual experiences since early childhood, who attended western universities, and developed teachings that resemble eastern philosophy which he presents through many books, classes and videotapes in an unusual personal style. He does not seem to teach yoga in any traditional form, but rather has developed his own approach to spiritual awakening, which he teaches at centers in several countries. He provides a fairly thorough history of his spiritual development and mystical experiences in his autobiography, The Knee of Listening.

Free John writes that from his earliest memories he always enjoyed an experience of the "bright", an incredible sense of himself as radiant , with joy, light and freedom in the middle of his head. He felt "in touch with consciousness itself", aware he was the same as everyone and everything.[54] He writes that during his first twenty years this sense of consciousness and light was gradually undermined by the ordinary and traditional patterns of life. Several times, during serious illness, he felt a sense of a mass of gigantic thumbs coming down from above and pressing into some form of himself that was much larger than his physical body.

In 1957 he began studying philosophy at Colombia University and began what he terms "an experimental life along the same lines which controlled the mood of our civilization. I decided I would unreservedly exploit every possibility for experience. I would avail myself of every possible human experience, so that nothing possible to mankind, high or low, would be unknown to me." [55]

One night as he sat at his desk contemplating the exhaustion of this exploring and feeling deep conflict, he experienced a total revolution of energy and awareness. A rising force caused him to stand and he felt it draw him out of his depths and expand, filling his whole body and every level of consciousness with wave upon wave of beautiful and joyous energy. He felt mad, but joyful, with an ecstasy in every cell that was almost intolerable in its pressure, light and force. He ran outside, hoping to find someone to communicate it to. His head began to ache as it saturated his brain and he returned to his room.

In 1961 he finished Columbia and began graduate work at Stanford. For six weeks he was part of a drug experiment at the VA Hospital, using mescaline, LSD and psilocibin at four different sessions. In one of these he felt profound emotion rising at the base of the spine and generating intense overwhelming love as it appeared in the heart. As it moved up through the head, the back of the neck and the crown he wept uncontrollably, as if all parts of his being had been simultaneously aroused, becoming conscious and alive. He had the thought "getting to cry is shaped like a seahorse."[56] In this process he believes he became conscious of the chakra body and Kundalini shakti which had opened in itself, and an internal form of consciousness became known to him. This "form" of the spiritual body was what he had known as the "bright" when he was a child. At this time he also felt the "thumbs" experience of his childhood, which also reoccurred later during meditations.

He lived with a woman who later became his wife, and became more secluded after this experience. He spent his time writing, and practicing intensive focusing on the mind itself, a training that ultimately made inner concentration and monitoring or witnessing of experience habitual. For years he struggled with deep introspection, feeling close to madness at times. Then he began serious study of psychic and mystical literature.

In New York he discovered a store front about which he once had a vision, and met a man called Rudi, who had been a student of Gurdjieff, Muktananda and Subud. He taught Kundalini Yoga and Free John asked to be accepted as his student. He was told to get a job and work six months first. After leaving the store he felt a current of strong energy rising up his arm from his right hand: it passed into his body with a "profound and thrilling fullness" and his heart felt vibrant joy. His head felt swollen as if it contained an aura that extended around his skull several inches. He began to run, feeling on fire with joy and incredible energy.

Classes with Rudi involved receiving shaktipat, after which he felt energy move from the eyes down the heart and chest to the genitals, then travel upwards through the back of the spine to the head. Students focused on the "so-hum" (more classically identified as "ham-sah") mantra, and felt themselves going out into space, beyond all the universe. During his time with Rudi, Free John says he learned discipline, saw images of light, felt energy charges and kriyas in his body, began twitching facial muscles and making animal sounds in meditation, felt great peace and went into samadhi.

In 1966 he moved to Philadelphia and studied at a Lutheran seminary. A few months later he had an experience he believes was akin to a mental breakdown. It began with a cold and he noticed his flesh becoming massy and unpliable and his body, gray, disturbed and deathlike. He was overcome by anxiety and fear of death, and felt that all his physical and mental processes were dying. He lay in bed with a fever, his heart seeming to slow down, beat irregularly and stop. He was taken to a hospital and told he was having an anxiety attack. It continued for three days. One day he laid down on the floor and allowed the rising fear and sense of death to overwhelm him, experiencing the death of his body and mind, witnessing it and allowing it to happen. He went through it and came to a place of infinite bliss, oneness with the universe and pure consciousness. He felt wonderful, and aware that the motivation and error of his whole previous life had been avoidance of relationship -- creating separation.

In 1968 he went to India to be with Muktananda. During the year he spent there he had many energetic and physical phenomena, transports to other worlds, and visions of the blue pearl or blue light within which he saw the supracausal or cosmic body. But he felt this was not the point and felt resistance to the ritual of Indian spiritual life. He returned to the U.S. in 1969. In seclusion and constant meditation he probed deeply the meaning of spiritual life, and began to teach meditation and have discussions with students about spiritual life, practice and experiences. At night he reports having fully conscious meetings with saints, yogis and miracle workers and seeing miraculous demonstrations of yogic powers; he felt the presence of Muktananda or Nityananda as they looked over his body. Later he returned to India, but the ashram environment had changed dramatically, and was much less personal. He was given work to do and expected to follow the formal routine, which seemed empty to him. While working in the garden one afternoon, he had a powerful vision of Mary. She asked him to visit the Christian pilgrimage sites, and soon afterwards he left India.

After returning to the U.S., Free John became a spiritual teacher, gradually developing a following of several thousand. He lives in Fiji, heads spiritual centers in several countries, and has written numerous books on spiritual awakening and related topics.

Commentary

This biography includes many experiences reported by those who awaken Kundalini in the West including early childhood psychic experiences, drug experimentation, exposure to Kundalini Yoga practices, movements of energy in the body, light and visions of spiritual teachers, heart problems and overwhelming fears of death, and samadhi. His struggle to understand life and spirituality is outlined more fully than most teachers, and he provides an opportunity to see what it is like to attend western colleges and seek spirituality within the context of western culture. The assistance of a teacher seemed critical at certain junctures, but he also had lengthy periods without a guide. The financial support of his wife appeared to alleviate any conflict about making a living during most of his explorations, and his interest in spiritual matters appears to be a life-long obsession, factors not uncommon in the literature and the lives of modern mystics.

Part 3:

Kundalini Experiences Outside of Eastern Traditions

Brugh Joy

Brugh Joy is an American physician who wrote an autobiography, Joy's Way (1979), in which he described what appears to be an awakening of Kundalini that occurred after a few months of meditation practice, which he learned from a spiritual teacher he identifies only as Eunice, who lived in Los Angeles. He was in bed when he began to feel such strong vibrations that the bed shook, and he thought it was an earthquake. This happened several nights in a row.

Later he began to experience what he called "superbrilliant light space...more intense than looking at the sun or any other brilliantly lighted object I had ever seen " Then, one night, lying in bed the motor feeling came on "like a diesel truck" shaking him and his bed. He wrote:

> It was first centered in my chest area, then moved into the lower abdomen, then up toward my head. On came the super-brilliant light. It was not just a flash, and it did not stop. For a moment, I was terrified. Then I heard a voice say, "What do you think you have been preparing for?" I accepted it and relaxed into the experience. It lasted for about six hours: intense, intense, intense white light and the quaking of my whole body. The next morning, I felt unusually rested and nothing appeared grossly different to my awareness, but over the next few months I recognized that my work was maturing and my ability to see energy fields was beginning to increase. Something subtle, yet profound, had happened to me that night. 57

After this the phenomena rarely occurred, although at the time of writing his book he had noticed the beginning of the original flashing pattern recurring.

Joy's experience led him to an exploration of psychic phenomena and healing practices. He traveled to Egypt and had extraordinary experiences in the pyramids. He learned to read the energy field of chakras with his hands, using this method for diagnosis and healing, and he developed theories about the location of chakras, much of it given to him by an inner teacher. He developed processes and exercises that awaken and transform energy, and he later discovered that some of the concepts he had been practicing and teaching were contained in the work of Theosophist Alice Bailey, Esoteric Healing (1953).

Commentary

Joy's experiences have many of the indicators of Kundalini awakening -- energy activity, lights and images, growing intensity of interest in spiritual matters, pursuit of healing and study of esoteric literature, changing his life as a physician to focus on work with chakras, healing and teaching processes to help others awaken their energy. He doesn't report emotional turmoil in the same style as other writers, but the awakening caused him to walk away from a successful medical practice, to spend months traveling on only 25 cents a day though India, and to undergo a personally directed initiation ordeal in the Great Pyramid in Egypt. He has reported psychic experiences such as sudden insight into esoteric truths, and has been deeply influenced by his dreams, at times undergoing major personality shifts because of their insights. In one instance he reports hearing a voice that gave him a simple comment or message when in the midst of kriyas. I have interviewed several people who experienced spiritual openings while participating in the intensive two-week seminars he teaches, which emphasize the awakening of heart energy, using energy for healing, recognition of the dark side of the psyche, and psychic development.

W. Thomas Wolfe

An unlikely Westerner to write a book on Kundalini is W. Thomas Wolfe, an IBM technical writer who reports an awakening in 1975, following meditation and lengthy exercises using biofeedback. His autobiography, And the Sun is Up: Kundalini Rises in the West, (1978) is useful in providing a perspective on how Westerners who are not prepared may experience this phenomenon, and because some of his experience correlates with yogic tradition and with that of subjects I have interviewed. Wolfe's work also shows how technologies used in modern therapy can be used in ways that produce Kundalini responses.

The biographical information presented by Wolfe indicates a tendency toward psychic experience as a child, the experience of lucid and telepathic dreams as a young adult, and a period of reading and studying all aspects of psychic phenomena, dream interpretation, and various esoteric and exoteric religions. During a period of financial stress, and anxiety about his dying father, he had what he felt was a nervous collapse. One day when his legs had gone to sleep from sitting he stood up and was swept by a feeling of panic as the tingling in his legs spread into his upper body. His entire body began vibrating furiously, and he ran outside, throwing himself face-down on the grass where he lay without moving, his arms spread to grab as much ground as they could. He felt as if his whole inner foundation had been wiped away and he had completely lost control.

Wolfe put aside psychic interests after this, and during the next twelve years he married, had two children and became involved in his career in New York. He describes himself as a hard worker and very competitive, somewhat nervous, a heavy smoker and drinker, who eventually consumed half a fifth of whisky and a six-pack of beer daily. Work intensity caused him to yell at co-workers and he developed chronic heartburn. Sometimes his heart would palpitate loudly and forcefully. At age 35 a challenge by a colleague forced him to see himself clearly, and he reevaluated his life, began to meditate, stopped drinking and smoking, and became friends with a couple of men who shared an interest in meditation and the psychic. After four months of meditation, following a self-styled adaptation of TM, he felt some relief of his chronic anxiety, and began recording dreams, and experiencing psychic events again.

Wolfe purchased a biofeedback machine and began practicing 30 minutes a day, trying various mental gymnastics to boost the amplitude of alpha waves and make them come and go at will. Within a month he had logged 54 hours of biofeedback time. Although he had mixed responses to the exercises he found that when he practiced them for any length of time he would be left with a feeling of residual bliss. He learned he could generate the most alpha when he let go and allowed inner volition to run the process. He noticed other strange effects such as heat building up under the electrodes on his head, coincident with periods of high alpha and theta wave generation. One night, after falling asleep, he felt a low-pitched humming current in his head.

Wolfe interprets a number of his dreams, which he feels are related to the Kundalini experience, and describes a number of experiences that followed prolonged biofeedback sessions. These include lying in bed and feeling a strong force in his head pulling him upward and to the right; feeling himself to be in a completely silent world; falling into an extreme ecstasy centered in the middle of his head; and having precognitive visions.

He believes his Kundalini awakening occurred one night when he was trying to sleep, and noticed a light pulsating in his mind's eye. It pulsed brightly, intensifying until it overpowered him and he heard strong, loud, discordant sounds. Then he felt a strong current run between the center of his head and his forehead, terminating just above the right eyebrow. His heart rate accelerated. The lights changed into a fixed, holographic pattern of large, luminous balls, which seemed to form a corridor he was either part of or traveling through. Wolfe calls this development a transmutation of consciousness, in which his body-sense changed into a sensation of being luminous spheres. An inner voice asked "Who is thinking now, Fred?" The thought seemed to give additional impetus to his travel down the corridor, and he became panicked. He tried to cut back on the intensity by recalling himself on his bed, and when he couldn't do so he felt trapped. Then he began to flicker between awareness of his childhood and his current homes. Finally the corridor vanished, the vibrations ended and he was able to realize where he was.

For seven months following this event his energy, experiences and psychic awareness intensified, and his body felt lighter. For two years more the experience abated and recurred periodically. His inclinations toward sex and negative emotions seemed deadened but the emotions of love, compassion and goodwill were magnified. In a series of dreams he felt beings trying to possess him, whom he believes were probably various personality components. Later on, during meditation, he had a vision of an immense burning sun breaking into his waking life, and he had experiences of a blue dot appearing, especially while reading.

He wrote: "There were many nights in this period that I spent sobbing quietly in the darkness before sleep to think that I would be losing my self and all my attachments, perhaps including my attachments to my loved ones. Becoming big was hard for me because I knew now that I had to cease being small. And it felt unstoppable."[58] He began meditations in which he pictured merging with Christ, and had dreams of merger, following which he seemed to feel more integrated.

Wolfe changed his work and moved and he began to spend time at a Muktananda meditation center learning yoga. During this period he had symptoms that put him in a coronary care unit for three days, thinking he had a heart-attack, but it could not be diagnosed. He began to have digestive problems and had to eat lighter and more frequent meals so as to digest food properly, and cut down on the amount of formal meditation and biofeedback sessions. After a few months his problems waned.

Wolfe's experience with Kundalini caused him to conclude that "One must pause at the heart of one's activities and know one's self. Life must be lived free of attachments, free of encumbrances of the senses. A man must accept what will come. He must let his Godhead live through him. He must be fully aware in all aspects of life. He must abandon all labels, including the label of self. . . The small self must dissolve -- go away. And this is not something one can force or do. It is what remains when one just gives up and surrenders oneself to what will be."[59]

Commentary

Wolfe's history holds many of the elements reported and commonly misdiagnosed in western subjects following Kundalini awakening, and demonstrates that this experience can happen to someone who has not led a disciplined or spiritual life before the awakening. Changes in Wolfe's energy impacted his life in nearly every area -- sleeping, eating habits, emotions, psychic and physical. He reports great emotional upheavals, losing attachments, temporarily deadened sexual energies, experiencing awareness of a blue dot (similar to the blue pearl of Muktananda), conditions similar to a heart attack and numerous other experiences. He was reoriented in this process to eastern spiritual practices, seeking out a guru, and feeling increased love and compassion. Some of the factors that may have assisted him through this process were his work with dreams and a journal, talking with friends who gave him emotional support, having a context of spiritual opening for his experience and seeking out a guru and a spiritual community.

Jung's Client With Kundalini Symptoms

In an appendix to Collected Works Vol. 16: The Practice of Psychotherapy (1954/1966), Jung describes a case in which a 25-year-old woman had physical problems and corresponding dreams that clearly indicate Kundalini activity. At the time he was working with her he found her "neurotic" symptoms indecipherable. He had no knowledge of eastern religion and he felt at such a loss in understanding her process that he repeatedly considered transferring her to another therapist. When the analysis felt stuck Jung had a dream in which she was sitting at the topmost pinnacle of a castle tower, high on a mountain top, golden in the light of the evening sun. When he told her the dream her symptoms emerged rapidly, beginning with "an undefinable excitation in the perineal region, and she dreamt that a white elephant was coming out of her genitals."[60] (A white elephant is a symbol associated with muladhara chakra, representing the carrier of the universe.)

Soon afterwards symptoms of uterine ulcers appeared. Her physician found an inflamed swelling of mucous membrane, about the size of a pea, which refused to heal for months and merely shifted from place to place, and then suddenly disappeared. Then she developed extreme hyperaesthenia of the bladder, although no local infections could be found. At Jung's urging to express herself, she began to draw vivid flowers in symbolic patterns. The bladder problem ceased and intestinal spasms developed, causing gurgling noises and sounds of splashing that could even be heard outside the room. She developed problems with the colon, ileum and small intestine, which abated after several weeks. Then she had the feeling "that the top of her skull was growing soft, that the fontanelle was opening up, and that a bird with a long, sharp beak was coming down to pierce through the fontanelle as far as the diaphragm."[61]

Although Jung felt he could not understand two-thirds of her dreams or give her any help, she felt the work was going "splendidly....I always have the craziest symptoms, but something is happening all the time."[62]

Synchronistically, after many months of analysis, someone gave him one of the first books published in English on tantric yoga, Avalon's The Serpent Power, and Jung could see that her dreams and experiences correlated with the symbolism of the chakras. He attributed this possibility to the fact that her psyche may have been influenced by living in Java for a while as a very young child, a rare lapse from his usual recognition of the universal symbolism of the collective unconscious. Jung wrote:

> When the Kundalini serpent had reached the manipura chakra ... it was met by the bird of thought descending from above, which with its sharp beak pierced through the fontanelle (sahasrara chakra) to the diaphragm (anahata) {sic}. Therefore a wild storm of affect broke out, because the bird had implanted in her a thought which she would not and could not accept. She gave up the treatment and I saw her only occasionally, but noticed she was hiding something. A year later came the confession. She was beset by the thought that she wanted a child.[63]

With the experience at the crown chakra the patient became obsessed with the idea of having a child, which seemed a great let-down to her. But by understanding a "little bit of Tantric philosophy" he helped the patient to make an "ordinary human life for herself as a wife and mother -- and to do so without losing touch with the inner psychic figures which had been called awake." He defined her symptoms as "neurosis caused by the forgotten early childhood influences which estranged her from her European consciousness" and he saw the cure as helping her have "a lasting spiritual possession instead of nebulous spiritual fantasies, as she led an ordinary life with husband, children and household duties." He cites this as an unusual case but not an exception. He writes of it as a "saga of blunders, hesitations and doubts" due to his ignorance of Oriental psychology. He adds "No psychotherapist should lack that natural reserve which prevents people from riding rough-shod over mysteries they do not understand and trampling them flat." And he adds, "the ultimate cause of a neurosis is something positive that needs to be preserved for the patient ."[64]

Commentary

Unfortunately Jung neglected to report whether his client reported any unusual spiritual, energetic or emotional conditions that might be correlated with Kundalini awakening. However, this case presents an opportunity to view how symptoms can be illusory and poorly diagnosed using a medical model or traditional therapeutic approach, and demonstrates how Kundalini imagery and conditions may arise in psychotherapy. He diagnosed her condition as a neurosis and used the therapy to help her adjust to an appropriate role in her society instead of addressing the spiritual implications of her obsession with having a child. It is possible that the dreams and physical symptoms may be only coincidentally related to Kundalini, and are more appropriately symbolic of a developmental stage in her consciousness having to do with taking on the feminine/mother aspects of her psyche, bringing her own creative forces into life. Jung does not define the nature of the "spiritual possession" she received from this analysis, and it would be necessary to have more information about her later psychological/spiritual evolution to accurately identify this case as a Kundalini experience. But his interpretation, that the images arose from her childhood experiences in Java, shows his lack of exposure at the time to Kundalini symbols and indicators, which appear cross-culturally in all traditions during spiritual awakening processes.

CHAPTER SIX

KUNDALINI AWAKENING IN THE WEST

When Westerners pass along their personal stories of awakening spiritual energy, having visions of the divine, or being thrust into the maelstrom of psychic upheaval generated by Kundalini it is usually with a sense of puzzlement, wonderment and anxiety. Nothing in western science or religion provides any rational foundation with which to understand and integrate this experience. People sometimes wonder if they are deluding themselves, if they are crazy, if they have a disease or if some great joke is being played -- for certainly they are not "holy" enough to "deserve" a genuine mystical encounter. To the extent that fear, doubt and self-deprecation persist, the path will be more difficult, for these negative emotions cloud the capacity to focus one's attention on spiritual development, and can lead to compulsive fixations on emotional or physical symptoms.

Spiritual openings in the West emerge in many patterns, following the diverse exploratory processes with which Westerners are often engaged, and sometimes occur with no apparent cause or trigger. These cases, collected through many hours of interviews, are less complete than those in the previously recorded literature because the subjects are still in process. They are not gurus, spiritual leaders or saints, and never expect to be. They have experienced openings, insights, visions, energy phenomena, change -- and they have a new sense of certainty and awareness about their beingness -- a connection with Self in the most profound sense. But they are still living ordinary lives, struggling with the demands of professions, relationships, families, schooling, and self-development. For some the events of Kundalini are ten to twenty years past, yet the experience still impacts their lives.

The uniqueness of each case is a reflection of the individuation of each life, showing a multitude of paths, all of which ultimately converge into the knowledge of the same transcendent Self. We can see many of the conditions associated with Kundalini in each history, yet can never be entirely certain this is a "classical" Kundalini awakening. What we can see clearly is that each individual is engaged in discovering that which is greater than ego, which brings the numinous forward in consciousness and creates the possibility of knowing a range of experience beyond the ordinary life.

Sarah

Sarah was born in 1918 to a widowed mother who was a Christian Scientist and a Theosophist. As a child she developed psychic and spiritual interests, especially feeling a connection with her deceased father, and was encouraged to explore these interests and to take responsibility in helping others less fortunate than herself. In her twenties she married a young law student, who later became a successful attorney, and she gave her energy to family and community service. For years she led a full life involved with community, church, and the rearing of six children and thirty foster children. She taught Sunday school and bible class, was a board member of many charitable groups.

In her forties Sarah became disillusioned with this work. She found herself moved by the retarded children to whom she taught religion, struck by the simple way they approached God. She began to study meditation, at first following practices one hour a day such as concentration on a candle, a match, or the breath. Over the next ten years she learned Transcendental Meditation (TM) and practiced meditation, yoga mantras, movement, concentration and/or problem-solving techniques up to two hours a day. In her fifties she became interested in parapsychology and Jungian psychology and returned to college to earned both a BA and MA in psychology. During this time she was also involved in a women's therapy group, producing much art with symbolic content. Then she attended a seminar with Brugh Joy at which her awakening occurred.

During the sessions with Joy she spent one hour daily meditating, and two sessions daily that began with listening to high intensity sound. She had inner sight (seeing in the mind's eye inside the body) so she could see the chakras. Brugh recommended that she visualize triangles joining at her solar plexus. Normally this visualization joined seventh, sixth, fifth, and fourth chakras but in one meditation she saw it going down all the way to the base chakra. As it hit this point it exploded upward through her body, like a tremendous whole body orgasm, sending tears down her face. She felt "unhinged" for two days afterwards. She was diffuse, unfocused, and quieter than usual. Her energy stayed very intense and she was awake all night. She felt sudden joy and laughed or cried spontaneously. She felt almost no boundaries and when she meditated the experience returned.

Since this event she sees this image and feels intense energy when meditating, sometimes several times a week, sometimes with months passing between experiences. Listening to music sometimes triggers the energy. Visions may come either spontaneously or in response to requests for information. An inner spiritual guide named Michael came and offered her guidance. She did many spontaneous works of art using symbols such as crosses, the AUM symbol (not knowing what it was), triangles, circles, fires and snakes. She reports no kriya activity (shaking or jerks of the body), dreams, or physical difficulties that seem related to Kundalini. She recalls several fearful visions, one in which she felt herself cut up piece by piece, and another in which swords were being taken out of her. She states that she learned to detach from negative visions, and "get the ego out of the way", and they stopped. One night she was awakened three times by a man's voice saying "Call to commitment". She feels this marked a deepening of her spiritual experience.

Sarah continued to work with Joy, and while doing meditation practices at his workshops she had more visions as well as clairvoyant experiences. She wrote three books, most of which came to her as she listened to music. "Each day I would have a piece of an overall vision and in two weeks I would have a complete story, which would tell me what was happening in the psyche. These were very easy to see and understand." Sometimes she saw entities associated with clients who assist her in healing them. She once smelled a Havana cigar in meditation and saw the spirit of a big, craggy English-man whom she had never met. He dictated information for his widow, who was her house guest at the time.

Since the awakening, Sarah has earned a Ph.D. in psychology. She practices psychotherapy and teaches, primarily doing small group work using imagery, music, dreams, art, dance, movement and meditation practices. The format for her group classes is always channeled to her. She also sees lights and colors in the chakras and can help people to release chakra blockages.

Sarah believes that "Kundalini energy feels like an invasion to some people and they are just resisting the invasion when they have many kriyas". Trust is the most important aspect in dealing with it. "I can take people to the level where they can see what they need and bring it back. We must trust the healer in them." When she works with others with Kundalini experiences she mainly listens and does a therapeutic process called voice dialogue, talking with the Kundalini energy. She feels it calms them down just to talk with her since they know she experiences it, and they feel less fearful of being crazy. She also helps them get in touch with blocked energy by going fully into the experience of it and asking what the body needs -- love, courage or relaxation. She works with dreams, art, dance or movement to express and release blocks.

Sarah does not report radical life changes related to this opening, but sees a deepening of her spiritual awareness, which she regards as part of a growing process in which she was already engaged. Her concept of God changed to a more impersonal view, seeing God as part of everyone and everything, and letting go of concerns about the past and future in favor of living for the "now". Where once she was an activist she is not anymore, but sometimes she "feels so much compassion it hurts". She comments "The more I am in it the less I know. I used to think I knew a lot but I'm not sure now. I'm moving into not-knowing, which is like Ken Wilber's concept of 'no-boundaries', and is not a very comfortable place."

Commentary on Diagnosing this Experience:

Sarah's experience is the least intense and frightening of any in this collection, and yet her subsequent productivity, psychic capacity and creativity is the most extensive of any of the subjects. She has reported the least amount of physical difficulty or illness and is probably the most energetic and yet she is the oldest, 68 at the time of the interview.

I recall Swami Tirtha's comment that Kundalini can arise through selfless work, because this has been the tenor of her entire life. She has done the equivalent of karma yoga, caring for numerous children and supporting many social causes. She has also experienced psychic tendencies throughout her life, a pattern that corresponds with at least half of the biographies and cases I have studied. These became significantly more pronounced and integrated after the awakening. She has clearly been devout spiritually and was seeking an experience of deeper awareness of God in her ten years of meditation practice. As a mature, spiritually-committed and stable person she may have had few of the doubts, personality conflicts, and insecurities that seem to trigger panic in others. Her life does not seem to contain the ambivalence, experimentation, self-preoccupation, and drug use of some who seek spiritual awakening; instead she was self-disciplined, led a well-ordered life and was content to be of service.

Sarah also had a context (Joy's work) and support system (a husband who was also involved in this work) to help her integrate and contain the experience. She had studied psychology deeply and had considerable therapy, as well as relationships with other people who had been in similar processes. Awakening presented no major conflicts about what to do with her life, but instead offered her a deeper spiritual dimension and greater intuitive power.

There may be many people like Sarah, seriously committed to God in the nature of their own religious traditions, who are unable to break through the barriers into direct experience because in their own tradition it is not considered a possibility. Belief systems, even in many religious orders and theological institutions, may preclude learning the methods helpful in releasing oneself to the encounter with the inner aspects of the divine.

Jayne

Born in 1943, Jayne was the only girl in a family of five children. She was raised in the Congregational church and describes herself as always spiritually searching, and having psychic experiences as a small child. She would frequently leave her body, and fly down the stairs at night, and wrote a poem about this when she was eight. She felt a strong psychic bond with her mother, who also had out-of-body experiences, and who went through a spiritual opening during a near-death experience in childbirth. Her brother, father, and husband were all alcoholics who died in the years before her awakening.

Jayne practiced hatha yoga, kriya yoga, pranayama and meditation exercises regularly for 20 years before her Kundalini experiences. She was widowed at the age of 31 when her husband died in an accident. She feels the death of the men in her life led to significant inner growth. She felt a great energy and personality change after her husband died and she began playing the piano and dancing, changed her style of clothing, and felt an intense personal power. She had a sense of putting her house in order. She was in therapy for three years and began a spiritual study group. Then she went on an Evolution of Consciousness cruise around the Mediterranean to a number of power spots in Europe and the Middle East. In the Great Pyramid she had a strong sense of having been there before. As she lay in the king's chamber a spontaneous sound of Aum emerged from her. She had out-of-body experiences during this trip, following which she remembered many past lives of being in Egypt and doing initiation ceremonies there. After this she visited a yogi at a healing center periodically, and she felt an inner connection with Sai Baba.

The first time Jayne felt Sai Baba's presence she was with a psychic in New York who saw East Indians around her and told her that Sai Baba wanted her to see him right away. She felt his presence and chills went through her body. Several times after this she felt he was present with her, and sometimes she saw his form and talked with him. During this time, from 1978 until 1984, she practiced pranayama and hatha yoga almost daily, meditated three to five hours a day, and was celibate.

For five years she experienced many physical symptoms such as energy in her head, starting often with a bursting feeling in the throat that felt like an enormous goiter, heavy and pulsating; she had shooting pains to the right of the third eye, and through the middle and back of the head; and she saw white and yellow lights. This occurred often when a psychic healer did chakra healing on her, when meditating and when working with clients as a masseuse. She often (daily) felt tingling, itching, tickling sensations, kriyas, spasms or orgasmic blissful feelings in her entire body. She sometimes had shooting pains from her chest down her arm. The first of these occurred at a yoga retreat in 1975, when the chest pains were so intense she thought she had a heart attack.

In the winter of 1984 she was mugged, and her foot was broken by an attacker. She was very upset by the incident and wanted to know why it had happened to her, so she visited a Tibetan Lama living in the area who told her there was a karmic reason for the incident. In April she visited a friend in the country and felt intense chills. A friend recommended a therapist who works with Kundalini and when she met him she recognized him from a dream she once had and felt an immediate bonding and intense infatuation. He had very intense energy or " shakti."

In June she began to experience extreme symptoms. For three months on an almost daily basis she had involuntary rebirthing experiences (Rebirthing is an intense breathing process which resembles hyperventilation, and produces birth memories and other images and experiences.) She saw visions of herself living in an apartment across the street (where she later moved), and became obsessed with the idea that she lived in the wrong chamber and needed a place to do healing. One night she "moved a table to the center of the room and lay on it all knives, tools, straight edges, scissors, razors -- everything you separate with. I knew I was getting at the bottom of things, seeking clarity. I knew I needed more clarity because of the merging I was doing in meditation."

She smelled perfume and felt it indicated the presence of Sai Baba. She lined up plants in terms of male and female, and thought of her desire for the alchemical marriage, blending of male and female within. She decided where each plant needed to be. She bought a sack of salt and sat in it. She felt frightened to be doing these things without her therapist there. Later she walked outside and "saw the world turning into many colors, and people seeming to be so nice to each other. I couldn't understand who was putting on this show." She went through a week of wearing white, feeling very pure and light, and seeing joy and kindness in everyone, dazzled by the brilliant intense colors of the world.

In another incident she put all of her furniture on the sidewalk outside, and locked herself indoors to do a rebirthing process. A friend came over and called the police when Jayne did not answer the door. When they arrived she convinced them she was okay and just wanted to be alone. She was very angry at her friend for not supporting her, and making her vulnerable to the police.

On another occasion she wrote an entire book of poetry in one sitting, and felt she was beginning a birth process. "I took off all my clothes, got in bed and said this is the day of my birth." But shortly afterward she fell into an intense depression, and went to a medical center for help. She was labeled manic-depressive, and felt even more desperate about herself, afraid she was going crazy. It happened shortly afterwards that she met a male friend and brought him home, where they made love. During the experience she felt intense Kundalini energy, starting in her legs and going up through her body. Her depression lifted completely and did not return.

She followed a number of practices to become more grounded, including eating meat, having bodywork with people who understood her symptoms, and having a daily massage, especially having her head and feet massaged. Other practices that seemed to her helpful were reflexology (foot massage), ginger soaks, relaxing in mud baths or tranquillity tanks (where one floats in body-temperature water), bringing routine and structure into her life, eating regularly, walking, using color healing, and balancing the endocrine system with minerals such as potassium, broth or mineral soups. She found she was more comfortable wearing a turban or tie around her head when she felt energy pulsating there.

In retrospect she feels this opening was the biggest event of her life. "Colors were so beautiful and music sounded so beautiful. I had an awesome appreciation of it all. For a week everything was just heavenly, and I couldn't understand why everything had gotten that way." She believes that since this time she is "over all more certain of my world view -- it would be hard for anyone to convince me I was wrong. I am positive of past lives and precognitive dreams."

Jayne says she is content with her life now, follows yoga practices, but limits pranayama and meditation. She does healing and massage for a living, and is clear-headed and open in talking of her experiences. She continues to experience periodic rushes of energy and bliss, along with visions of light.

Commentary on Diagnosing this Experience:

The key to evaluating whether or not Jayne had a Kundalini experience lies for me in her extensive prior spiritual practices. She had followed these with intensity and devotion and experienced symptoms of heightened pranic activity and/or Kundalini for many years. Although the erratic behavior and depressive aspects of her response are more intense than many would suffer, this is clearly described in the biographical histories of Goel and Krishna She also had a number of personal traumas in her life -- an alcoholic father, brother and husband, all of whom died, and the mugging and injury.

Because she was psychic as a child, I would expect Jayne to be sensitive and unusually open to the impact of psychic phenomena. Her sensitivity may have intensified her reactions to the trauma of being mugged (which under many circumstances can cause breakdowns in some people). Her profound projection on her therapist may have heightened her emotional intensity, along with the lengthy period of celibacy. Rebirthing is an extremely cathartic breathing process, in which the body hyperventilates and seems to slough off all the old stored pains and blockages. It may be that Jayne went into a temporary emotional overload, either as a response to Kundalini or creating a trigger for the Kundalini to erupt in her system, which had been preparing for it for many years. The spontaneous writing of poetry and its curative influence is also common to many experiencing Kundalini.

The initial irrational psychological states are past her now but the energetic and light manifestations continue, and further levels of awakening will probably continue for many years.

Nan

Nan describes herself as a child who was always spiritually oriented. She felt she could commune with trees, animals and stars, and felt a presence with her that she believed was God. She sometimes saw the image of a triangle, and heard mantras being sung. She felt "the order of the universe as her mother, and the divine presence as her father". She felt "different from other kids and my parents" as a child.

She was a college student in the Midwest in the '60's and was involved in drug experimentation, especially with LSD. She had intense mystical episodes on drugs, but during two of these trips she experienced an arching in her lower back and an uncontrollable panic and fear of isolation and annihilation. After this she stopped using all drugs. She felt despairing, and that on LSD she had "reached for everything she ever wanted, God, and had failed". She had continual feelings of being terrified for six to eight months. She saw a psychiatrist who gave her Mellaril and Ritalin, which she took for a few months. She began reading yogic books and recognized many of her own experiences in them; she was surprised that they had happened to people who were not using drugs.

When a yoga teacher came to the area Nan learned to meditate, and while doing so would hear street sounds blocks away and see the color purple. She felt the presence of a "being" with her. She would have the urge to move into different asanas, but her teacher discouraged her and told her this was her imagination. This frightened her and she gave up her practice for six months.

A few months later she and her husband were evicted from the farm where they lived, but another farm on 1000 acres became available and they moved. The first thing she did there was set up a meditation room, and begin meditating again. She began to meditate regularly twice a day, but was plagued with fear and feelings of inadequacy. One night she had a dream of Hari Kan Baba (a deceased Indian spiritual teacher) in which he came and talked with her. She woke up in the cold night, her body burning up, and found her husband had just had the same experience, waking up with great heat in his body. She heard the voice of an inner guru in her mind and suddenly realized she had been hearing it for at least two months in meditation but had been forgetting it when returning to normal consciousness. As she remembered, she "felt the power of this inner guru's love and caring".

She began to feel she was overshadowed by a divine presence who was controlling her life and protecting her. Falling in love with him was very frightening. It was a beautiful experience, but painful because she feared she was losing her mind. She spent hours wandering alone in the woods with this being, meditating and feeling unity and ecstasy. "I had a very personal experience of God as the beloved, which was very different than my LSD experiences, which were of God in an impersonal form. I would hear a phrase or comment and in one word there would be a power and intensity of absolute love and compassion beyond description and impossible to withstand without melting." At times when she drifted out of the ecstasy she was fearful that she was going crazy. "All I wanted was to merge and have no separate identity, having a separate individuality was painful. I had a desperate longing for unity which wouldn't end."

Nan had been very dependent on her husband because of her previous fears. He went out of town for two weeks and she stayed alone. She was so unstable she could not take care of herself and the inner guru told her what to buy at the store and when to eat. She states she wouldn't have eaten otherwise. She was not in her body, and felt the physical was being taken care of by his instructions and she was protected so that nothing bad could happen. It was an experience of feeling guided. Her guide told her he was her "kulu guru". She had never heard Sanscrit before, and found in a dictionary that kulu meant sheepherder. Later, while in India, she learned that kulu referred to the coiled or dormant power of Kundalini, and the term kulu guru "was used to designate the guru of the kulu Kundalini opening".

She describes three main issues overwhelming her at the time -- the tension of longing, fear of her sanity, and obsession about the meaning of the experience. She was told by the guru she was not intellectually capable of understanding it, since it was "outside of her present construct of reality", and also that "the experience is an expression of the universe's love for itself". He told her to write down her early childhood experiences and then to read them aloud. In this way she gradually relived her early childhood, birth and womb experiences during the two weeks she was alone in the house. During this period of isolation she sometimes imagined there were monsters walking around, and heard footsteps. She believed the guru was creating these experiences to desensitize her and help her overcome her fears. When she was finished writing, he told her to take the journals and burn them.

One day the guru told her that he had come to assist her, but that he would be leaving soon because he was angered by the way she had wasted her life thus far. "He told me that I had gotten myself in such a mess that I needed this intervention to get out of it. I felt like surrendering, and yet I did not want him to leave and mentally asked him to stay with me. There was a silence in which I felt him assessing my being and I saw my past lives flash by like on a deck of cards. I then felt a surge of energy, love and expanded consciousness. As it rose the external world fell away entirely and I felt merged with him in total unity. I have never had such an intense experience. If this had been complete I would have died, and this world of form would be gone."

After this, the fears and experiences gradually began to subside. However, when Nan meditated an excruciating pain would develop at the base of her spine and begin moving upward. After about 15 minutes it would become intolerable and she would have to stop meditating. It would then subside. This lasted for two weeks. Nan continued to feel her guide's presence with her.

She decided to go to India and moved to a large city in order to earn some money for the trip. At this time she would fall easily into a trance. She would "experience a word or a quality of God and feel a manifestation of it flood over me, such as the feeling of perfect justice or perfect compassion". She would meditate for hours, experiencing bliss and unity. She felt a passion for a level of unity she couldn't attain, was very ungrounded, and felt unable to express herself through her previous persona.

Eventually she went to an ashram in India, where she meditated up to eight hours a day and did not eat very much. She often went into samadhi during and after darshan (sitting with the teacher). She experienced ecstatic energy, coming in waves, and sometimes extreme sexual energy moving upward, with strong sensations around the heart chakra, "feelings of expansion, surrender and ecstasy". She would fall over backward when meditating. The ashram practiced tantric yoga, and Nan and others frequently experienced kriyas such as making sounds, humming, jerking their bodies, rolling around on the floor and falling over. She experienced "twisting-snaking energy that was blissful, moving from the lower back or base of the spine upward, that caused my body to writhe around, moaning and groaning, twisting, swaying, falling forward or backward and then having a sudden backward jerk of the head accompanied by the sound 'hum'. There was also an arching backward until falling over." Sometimes she fell over and rolled on the ground or moved into asanas or mudras, and once she danced in ecstasy.

Nan practiced pranayama, asanas, lessons for cleaning and balancing chakras, developing the seed qualities of chakras, mantra meditations and visual meditations. None of these calmed her emotions, "only serving to intensify my passion for spiritual unity and relationship to the inner guru". She felt her spiritual experiences were respected in this environment -- she was a spiritual person and not a crazy person, which helped resolve her fears about her sanity. But after several months, she became ill with chronic amebic dysentery and a kidney infection, and spent two weeks in the hospital. She became very thin. Her physician said she would die if she didn't go home, and said that her symptoms were related to her spiritual practices. Reluctantly, she returned to the United States.

In the years since Nan has completed college and graduate school, raised a family and engaged in charitable work. She continues to meditate and experiences blissful feelings of unity, waves of energy, kriyas, and the presence of spiritual guides. At times in meditation she has out-of-body experiences, experiences shaking, vibrations, ecstasy, and spontaneous yogic breathing patterns (rapid breathing or stopping of the breath). Sometimes she feels a "downward-blessing type of energy from the crown, often accompanied by a visual picture of a white lotus with petals dripping down amrit (nectar)". She often sees white or purple light or a thousand-petaled lotus while meditating. At the time of her father's death she saw a vision of her father and her guru (whom she had asked mentally to assist her father at death) walking into her room, and she reports other psychic experiences such as an ability to "read" people at times, or knowing a lot about a topic as if she has "hooked into information from a collective body of information". She reports some extremely effective results doing hands-on healing. After her guru's death she felt a continued connection with him, and has been writing books that seem to be channeled from him.

Nan has had continual health difficulties that may or may not be related to Kundalini. She believes her health problems are her body's way of getting her attention. Over the years she has had pain and disorders of the digestive system, pelvis, urinary tract, kidneys and liver, as well as heart palpitations and back problems. She has treated these problems with medical treatments as well as verbal and bodywork therapies.

Nan feels the major impact of her spiritual experiences is the "precious gift of love...many people never have that kind of love in their life. Relationships with people are like reflections of the divine. The experience with the guru is more like direct light. It is a tremendous gift. My whole value structure is based on the experience, so that my whole emotional structure is based on it...the important thing is to live for the welfare of all sentient beings and try to complete this journey and be one with the divine." She says she may not always have lived up to these goals, but on the whole humanitarianism has formed her sense of values and way of operating.

Commentary on Diagnosing This Experience:

The pattern of Nan's life clearly suggests this was a Kundalini awakening although at the time it could easily have been diagnosed as reactive to her heavy LSD use. In a hospital setting, encounters with a luminous guide would be interpreted as hallucination. But this kind of psychic guru experience is common in the literature. It is quite similar to that described by Krishnamurti who saw two guides in times of crisis, and both B.S. Goel and

Gabriel Cousens have reported seeing appearances of Sai Baba, as has the previous subject, Jayne. Gurus who appear to devotees often give specific information and advice. The literature also refers to receiving shaktipat through a guru who is no longer in the body. Kennett Roshi describes encounters with an entire group of sages. It seems possible, if one accepts eastern cosmology, that the etheric or astral plane contains many highly conscious beings who influence events in our lives, either with or without our awareness. This experience of Nan's appears far deeper than any hallucination for she is given very specific and useful direction which seems entirely beyond her ordinary consciousness at that time.

Nan was feeling desperate, frightened and depressed as she entered this crisis. She reports herself as following spiritual interests from early childhood, and the intensity of her spiritual aspiration may have brought her to some profound openings under the influence of LSD, for which she was totally unprepared. It is difficult to say how or when her Kundalini energy awakened, but she demonstrates many of the characteristics -- heat, energetic phenomena or kriyas, involuntary asanas, seeing light, psychic contacts, wandering disoriented in states of ecstatic bliss, seeing monsters in ways described by Irina Tweedie, Muktananda and others, seeing past lives, and having a passionate desire to meditate. Since the time of this occurrence over 18 years ago she has continued to experience bliss, light, and occasional kriyas while leading a productive and stable life.

Nan's physical problems are similar to those Gopi Krishna endured but could also be related to the illness in India or a generally weak constitution. Residual toxins from the use of LSD probably compounded the difficulties. It is likely the intensity of Kundalini energy will cause more problems for someone who is not constitutionally strong, and that preoccupation with spiritual experiences that take one out of body consciousness may cause damage over time to the body's energy system. Perhaps hatha yoga, said to be given to the more materialistic people of the Kali Yuga, was developed to build body-consciousness and control, in order to keep the yogi more healthy despite his or her out-of-body consciousness.

Margaret

Margaret was raised on the east coast, the only child of an upper-class intellectual father and vivacious French mother. The family was Catholic, but neither parent attended church, and they were surprised to find their daughter very interested in catechism classes, mass and God. She had a sincere and loving interest in religion until she experienced two humiliating incidents at church, once with a bishop who did not like the confirmation name she had chosen (her grandmother's name) and loudly commented on it when she made her Confirmation; and another time when a 13-year old friend came and waited for her outside the church and the pastor called her a hussy for wearing shorts.

Margaret was ill frequently as a child, with many allergies and every known childhood disease. Her vision was poor. She had her tonsils removed three times. Twice, at age 8 and ll., she had near-death experiences when she had extremely high fevers and rashes, lasting one or two weeks, and she would be out of her body. These could not be diagnosed nor treated by doctors, who advised her parents to pray. As a teenager she had constant lower back pain, generally labeled growing pains by doctors. Finally at age 18 she went to a specialist who thought she had a tumor. They did surgery and discovered two crushed disks near the base of the spine. These were removed and a two-inch space was left just above the first chakra, wired up but never filled with a metal plate. Immediately after the surgery she was totally paralyzed, only her eyes moved, although she was aware of everything going on in the room. Doctors did not know what was wrong, nor what to do. After a few hours she came out of the coma, slowly feeling the paralysis dissolve, beginning in her toes and fingers and spreading through her body. The doctors did not know if she would ever walk again, but she was determined to attend college in the fall, and insisted on getting out of bed, and within a week and a half began walking, building her capability up over the next three months and entering college. She was advised to avoid all heavy lifting and any activities where she could fall, such as bike riding. She earned both BA and MA degrees.

In her twenties Margaret began religious seeking, attending many churches and reading about religion.

During the 1960's she became involved in growth and encounter groups, did some sexual experimentation, tried alternative lifestyles such as living two years in a commune, and she occasionally used marijuana and psychedelics. She read the Seth books which made her see a new way of looking at God, without judgment and sin. She studied psychology, especially Jung. She began meditating regularly, and taught others to meditate, initially using TM. She became interested in Robert Monroe's book on out-of-body experiences and tried to learn to leave her body at will and to do astral projection, with no success. During morning meditations she experienced some phenomena of light and energy, and sometimes saw golden lights or the molecular breakdown of furniture or objects so that she could see through them. She then had some out-of-body experiences, and sometimes saw auras. She began to hear messages as if from an inner guide.

One day she began a meditation ritual of holding herself in white light and love, making a few notes on questions she wanted to bring up, then sitting in a meditative or trance-like state and doing a visualization of walking down a tunnel and seeing one or more figures in white forms. As she listened to guides who spoke to her, she would speak into a tape recorder their responses. She is not sure if they were outside herself or sub-personalities in the deep unconscious, but their information was supportive, and led her into self-awareness. A voice would talk with her very much as a therapist might, focusing on growth, reflection and self-examination. There seemed to be several entities, and they told her they were a conglomerate energy, and called themselves Pi. Later she discovered that "in Chinese symbolism the Pi symbol is a disk with a central hole signifying heaven or the doorway from temporal to non-temporal existence".

During these dialogues her body would vibrate as if electrical currents were running up and down her legs and out her fingers, and she would feel extreme pressure or denseness of her head and neck. She might get very cold, and need to wrap in blankets. She would sit without any movement for an hour or more and be very stiff when she stood up. In the beginning weeks, lights in the house would blink at times, and electrical problems occurred while she meditated. She sometimes heard music on the tapes later that she knew had not been in the background.

A friend sat with her during sessions, and Margaret recorded them and wrote everything she learned. She was taken into very deep issues around her childhood, and given a whole new perspective about these. She ended up writing a complete autobiography. Sometimes scenes would be presented and the guide would make comments or ask her about it. At times she would witness and experience past lives, and the guides told her the point was to make them relevant to issues she was working on. She felt incredible compassion and nonjudgmental guidance. She was in Jungian analysis at the time and would take huge amounts of personal material to her therapist, who worked with her and supported her although he was somewhat apprehensive about the risks of channeling. Margaret worried about her sanity at times, but would reassure herself that she must be sane since she functioned well at work and could take care of all her needs. During this time she met and married a man who was consistently interested and supportive through this process.

Margaret continued these practices for several years, doing them three times a week. At times the energy would come up in other settings and she always recognized it when she felt "slightly spacy" with heaviness in her head. She spoke with the guides one day and asked them not to bother her while she was driving or working, and the experience stopped happening at those times.

She began doing psychic readings for a few friends, but this raised many questions for her, as she did not want to "get into this level of messing around with the universe." She felt people wanted guidance and answers that they would be better off seeking for themselves, and she stopped this kind of activity.

During this time and since then she has had consistent back pain, throbbing and aching, but this has been true all her life, and she feels she has learned to live with it and barely notice it. The pain varies in intensity at different times, and she doesn't know why. Primarily it strikes the lower back and between the shoulder blades. In the morning she has to move slowly due to the pain on waking. Sometimes at night she feels one or a few waves of energy that begin at her feet and sweep through her body and the top of her head. She often wakes at 2 a.m.

in the morning as if someone has shaken her or called her name, but she feels this could be a menopausal symptom, along with the sweating and heat flashes she often experiences. Twice she has done major healing on herself. At one time she had lifted heavy boxes and hurt her back so badly she was unable to move. Lying in bed she had a dialogue with her back in which she felt deeply in touch with that part of herself, listened to what it needed, and promised to take better care of it. She fell asleep and a half hour later woke up to answer the phone, realizing as she stood in the kitchen that the pain was gone. Another time she severely scalded her hand, and went through a similar process which healed it. At other times she has been unable to heal physical traumas.

She had many vivid dreams at the height of this process, and in some lucid dreams the guides came to her and said "Come with me, there is something I want you to see" and would show her a place or a representation of something. In the most powerful of these she was shown a dark rectangle, and was told that it was a representation of a person's life. It was black except that for little twinkling lights. She saw many rectangles, some with a few lights scattered here and there, some with more lights clustered. She was told the twinkling lights were places where love was given and received in that lifetime -- nothing else in those lives matters, the only thing that matters are moments of love.

Sometimes she goes into a hypnogogic state, where she suddenly enters a third or fourth dimension, rather like wearing 3-D glasses where "dimensionality shifts somewhere such as to the astral plane". Then she sees beautiful nature scenes.

Margaret eventually felt that all the world was God, and learned "to see beyond the ordinary conditions of life". God became less personalized. "I am more and more aware of God being everything and we are all part of this. All we do or do not do is part of a learning pattern." She is deeply attuned to nature and experiences bliss, weeping at times before the beauty of the sky, ocean, and mountains, seeing God permeating everything. "This planet is incredibly beautiful." She feels great love flowing in her and her heart expanding before nature, or when listening to classical music. In recent years, although she rarely does the channeling, under the surface is a constant sense of the beauty and infinity of God. She feels she still needs to accept that the dark side of life is also God. She has an intense affinity with animals and feels that a growing edge is to improve relationships, since she has always been extremely introverted. She hopes to create or experience more of the twinkling lights shown in her lucid dream.

Commentary on Diagnosing This Experience:

Margaret experienced a psychic opening of major dimensions, and it is probable the Kundalini has awakened in her system, although her symptoms are quite different from that of the other subjects. It is possible some of the back pain, heat flashes, insomnia and other symptoms that she attributes to ordinary physical problems are related to Kundalini. Without the back disorder and the fact that she is menopausal we would certainly have to consider these symptoms as originated by Kundalini, but it is possible they are not. Other aspects, such as the waves of energy sweeping through her, remembering past lives and the hypnogogic states are seen commonly in the literature. She had many preliminary manifestations in meditation, common to other subjects and in the literature. Her intentionality in seeking a religious experience is also a factor in common with the others.

Margaret's case interests me especially because I had questioned whether people with spinal injuries could awaken this energy, and the part of her spine missing is where the Kundalini energy is reportedly housed. This could explain why she would not experience the intense whole-body symptoms. Of course, if the physiology of Kundalini is related entirely to the subtle body rather than the material body this would not be a factor. Perhaps Kundalini energy has primarily activated only her upper chakras, particularly the heart and the third eye, sweeping her into consciousness through visualization and psychic awareness. Perhaps it awakened earlier, during the childhood NDEs or at the time the two disks were crushed.

It is clear that many kinds of psychic experiences happen without Kundalini awakening, and it is important not to assume they are the same thing. But psychic openings such as Margaret's, especially those involving spiritual guides, are found in the literature related to Kundalini openings. Theoretically, psychic manifestations could provide education and psychological readiness for some people prior to awakening, based on the evidence of other case histories. Margaret has also moved into profound experiences of love and joy, as well as a new consciousness of God as being all of the universe, which correlates completely with scriptural references to Kundalini awakening.

Chris

Born in California in 1941, Chris was raised Catholic by a devout mother and non-Catholic father. She reports feeling a close connection with Jesus as a child, and took religion seriously, but she had difficulties with the philosophy of the church and left it in the early years of her marriage. She was the oldest of three children, and felt loved and secure in her family life until the death of her mother at age 14. Her father did not cope well with the loss, and she felt distant from him after this. He remarried when Chris was 16 to a woman she could not relate to and she left home at 17. She worked and attended college for two years before marrying.

As a young housewife with three children she had little interest in spiritual activities until her early thirties when she became involved in an organization that used group processes in psychology and meditation to promote personal change and growth. At their meetings she studied Jung, engaged in encounter groups and began meditating. She became close to the members, who formed an extended family with which her own family became very involved. After four years she left the organization because of its demands on her time, but she felt grieved, certain she would never experience such a place of belonging again. This brought back the earlier loss when her mother died and her family connections disintegrated, a loss she had never fully mourned, and she cried for days.

As she struggled to get through this period, Chris began to practice meditating seriously, seeking a relationship with God, or at least an answer to life that would reassure her she was not so alone. She attended weekly meditation groups with followers of Muktananda and Yogananda, and meditated at home for several hours a day. She felt an inner connection with Yogananda, after reading his book Autobiography of a Yogi (1945). She went to a Christmas program with Muktananda at his ashram in Oakland, but felt shy and distant from him and the intensity of the followers there. She experienced darshan, being tapped by him with a peacock feather after waiting in line with several hundred people, but didn't feel any reaction.

A few weeks later she went to a week-end program with Roy Eugene Davis, a spiritual teacher who had been a disciple of Yogananda's, and received kriya initiation. When she tried the kriya yoga practices she imagined energy moving up her spine and into the crown of her head, and it was slightly uncomfortable. Eventually she let the practice go. Sometimes she experienced intense energy when meditating, and it was hard to sit still. One day when she was practicing a zen breathing practice she felt a sense of letting go, of expansion into space, which made her feel wonderful.

Something about this opening worried her however. She thought later "I knew if I could be happy just being a 'housewife' and washing dishes I would never do anything else with my life. I might lose my ambition and my dreams. I knew nothing of the philosophy of yoga, or the potential of this opening". She then enrolled in an MA program in psychology and became very busy, and meditation became infrequent with concentration difficult. A few years later she felt as if "I had lost all the facility I once had in reaching peaceful, joyful places."

During the next ten years she attended college and taught educable handicapped young adults, worked in rehabilitation, established a private therapy practice, completed three years of Jungian analysis, took numerous courses and seminars, raised her children, moved into a new house, and maintained a home and marriage. She traveled to Switzerland and Egypt, and she believes that both experiences affected her sense of independence, making her feel that limitations in life are primarily self-imposed. Eventually she felt "There were many things I could do, but they were all just passing time. I wanted to reestablish a relationship with God."

Chris became interested in working with the body as an adjunct to therapy, and took courses in Jin Shin Do Acupressure and neo-Reichian bodywork. She attended a training with Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks in which for the first time she saw clearly a relationship between spirituality and energy. She began doing individual therapy with

Gay and told him her intention was to release any barriers she had to having a complete relationship with God. In the first session they worked with her body, breath and energy, doing deep rapid breathing, kicking, and flowing into an altered state of consciousness. About two hours later, sitting in a rather dull class, her body suddenly began to feel gentle charges, or tremors, filling her with bliss. "It was as if I were on a drug, becoming more and more high, waves of orgasmic-like pleasure flowing through me." This continued for about two days.

The following week-end she attended a Vipassana meditation retreat, and fell into deep and peaceful meditation. Following these two experiences she felt compulsively drawn to meditate, and began to practice one or two hours a day, taking short breaks during the day to go back into meditative states. "I began to experience a great variety of energy releases, sometimes waking in the middle of the night shaking, or feeling streams of gentle blissful energy pouring through me from my feet through the crown of my head. Once, while reaching to pick up a book of Yogananda's I felt pressure as if a hand were on my shoulder, which gently pushed me down to the floor, and for several hours I laid in an altered state full of ecstatic energy, light, and joy."

During the following months she went through several intense emotional experiences, at one point feeling so needy for love and caring she wanted to die from it. "It was as if all the neediness of the world was passing through my body. I learned that if I was willing to completely feel whatever the universe was laying on me at that moment, if it was God's will or part of my karma, that in the act of surrender the entire complex could lift spontaneously and I would reel with a sense of freedom and new energy."

A friend introduced her to yoga, and she began to explore books that discussed Kundalini energy. As she read she recognized her own experiences, and her body seemed to respond to some of the scriptures, sending so much energy through her that she would frequently have to put the books aside and fall into meditation.

Deep in her studies of Kundalini, she would feel occasional doubt that what she experienced was really Kundalini, since it was more pleasant and less intense than that of many of the people she read about, and one night after wondering this she was awakened about 2 a.m.: "I felt as if I had been tossed into a galaxy of energy and light, my body stretched out and quivering while rushes of blissful energy rolled through me. I heard a voice deep inside say 'Of course this is the real thing, we're just taking it very easy on you." This energy flow lasted several hours, until she decided she needed to go back to sleep. At one point she distinctly heard a sound that she had never heard before, and has been unable to recall, except that it seemed to come from some distant echo chamber.

In the years these experiences have continued they have come in many forms. Sometimes she feels afraid of being so entangled in a process that is clearly not common, and she feels great emotional swings and depression; at other times she feels she receives a gift of pure wisdom, as if someone is teaching her something she needs to know. She often falls asleep in a meditative state, and it is the first practice she is drawn to when she awoke in the morning. At times life seems more joyous and at other times she feels very uninvolved in life and frightened that she may have destroyed her life by taking the meaning from activities she used to enjoy. She may spontaneously fall into bliss, and experiences it frequently when meditating.

During a yogic retreat while meditating in the sun she had "an intense awareness of a column of brilliant light running through me, which was my Self or higher consciousness, completely free, and the activities of personality or 'prakriti' swirling around this column to get my attention and keep me earth-bound. It seemed as if I could identify with either one and each would direct where my energy would go." This was a profoundly centering and moving event. She recalls the image when she wants to feel centered and calm.

Chris's body shakes, vibrates or jerks often while meditating, when resting in bed, or following sex. She felt no pain until about two years into the process, when she reported great stiffness on getting up in the morning, especially in her ankles and legs. Sometimes her waist was numb and she could not turn over when she first woke up for about five minutes. Often she has aches and pains or flashes of heat and cold, and three or four times a month she has difficulty falling asleep because of feeling so highly charged energetically. Occasionally the high energy levels make her feel "strung out".

She reports a period of intense depression and despair, accompanied by her body feeling as if it were dying internally, dull, aching, and sluggish. These symptoms seemed to abate during meditation. She began having Jin Shin Do Acupressure treatments weekly with someone who understood and supported the energy, and would go into intense kriyas during the sessions, shaking, jerking, doing asanas, and feeling a loss of conscious awareness. "It felt as if my energy body was sucking all the energy the bodyworker could give me and flooding the entire system with it, becoming very charged and enlivened." Over several months most of the aches and sluggishness of her body disappeared. During one experience, she felt an intense powerful upward surge of power "like an electrical charge" from the muladhara through the crown chakra, with uncontrollable vibrations for several minutes, feeling wonderful and shocking, which left her whimpering. The energy seemed to stay in the head, making her feel strong. "It was as if a lot of the questions and problems which had bothered me before felt insignificant, as if I were identified with a wiser and stronger part of my inner Self."

She reports seeing light only rarely, usually in meditation or during bodywork, and she has had no spontaneous visions. She does not feel she has psychic abilities or other yogic "powers", although she is strongly intuitive in her work, and is exploring methods of using energy for healing. Her eyesight is significantly less sharp than when this process began. She has rushes of blissful energy at unexpected moments, such as when walking down the street, and feels energy in the crown of her head, tingling like electrical charges. This happens especially when she is around someone else who has awakened Kundalini. There is a consistent steady hum or vibration in her entire body, and she easily goes into deep states of meditation. She has had experiences in which she felt her awareness was outside time and space, and in which she was plunged into unitive consciousness. Chris has felt support in having someone else to talk to, but relies on a strong sense that she needs to turn inward, through meditation, for any answers she needs. She believes that several past-life regressions, in which she relived spiritual lives, were immensely helpful in integrating the spiritual part of her psyche. She became involved in yoga, and frequently attends meditation programs and retreats. She is resistant to the discipline of practicing hatha yoga but feels it is very good for her, and she involuntarily does yoga asanas and breathing practices at times during breathwork or meditation. She says she can easily assimilate spiritual texts that she could not understood before.

She believes that two factors that may have supported her process are her lengthy study of Jungian psychology, which taught her to witness and wait when she experienced splits between opposing desires or difficult truths about herself; and the solid structure of her 25-year marriage. In addition, having friends and therapists who she could talk to about it was extremely helpful, along with learning about yoga and reading the scriptures. She finds also that "over and over I must resort to trust in the inner Self and in the positive intentions of the infinite or divine force of the universe to sustain me. It seems it is fear, anger, mistrust and emotional attachments that consistently block the positive energy and bliss." She cites breathwork and acupressure as major practices that help her to release blocks. She believes Kundalini awakening is a process along the way to a spiritual life, and not that spiritual life itself, calling it a cleaning-up process, although the energy itself is blissful when it is not hitting barriers in the physical or subtle body.

Commentary on Diagnosis of This Experience:

Chris demonstrates many symptoms of Kundalini awakening -- bliss, physical sensations, kriyas, emotional upheavals, and samadhi experiences. It is possible this happened because of shaktipat experienced years before with Muktananda, or because she was intensely seeking it, and meditating, before the time that bodywork opened her system more fully. She demonstrates how spiritual opening can occur in stages, if we consider her earlier experience a precursor to the later opening.

She says "At some level in my being I gave up the desire for anything else -- I really deeply wanted to know God. And I feel the therapist who opened my energy up knew exactly how to assist me in this intention. I also feel Yogananda, although I've never seen him, has been with me in my spiritual search since the very beginning, when a friend recommended his autobiography to me in a grocery store years earlier. I have continually turned to him and asked him to push me through into the next stage of awareness as far as I can go and I always feel a response."

Her maturity and years of analysis, her stable relationships, friends who support her in this process, understanding bodywork therapists, having a context for spiritual awakening through both breathwork and yoga, her in-depth study of yogic literature, and her commitment "to allow God to do whatever is needed to help me become more free," may be some of the factors that make the process generally pleasurable and manageable for her.

Beth

Beth, born in 1951, was the youngest of five children, raised in Arkansas in a family in which she "was not especially happy as a child." Her father was a car mechanic. Her mother was often depressed, but Beth recalls no traumas or major difficulties. She had a basic Christian upbringing and attended a Baptist church occasionally, but felt no affinity for it, even though she thought a lot about God and why she was here. She believes she may have had energy experiences around the ages of six or seven, and has a vague memory of intense energy in the perineal area as a child, and precognitive awareness. This went away after puberty.

Beth became interested in eastern books at age 15, mostly Zen Buddhism, and at age 18 she began practicing meditations she learned from these books for a few minutes a day. "Mostly I would sit and think about things a lot" she says, " and I became more and more preoccupied with thoughts of God and the meaning of life, sometimes thinking all day long on these questions". She began working as a hospital aide and when people died it would trigger deeper questions. She attended junior college and enrolled in a four-year school to study nursing.

When she was 21 Beth was awakened one night unable to breathe. "I felt as if I was being electrocuted. My body was paralyzed. I could not even move a finger or call out for help. I was wide awake but terrified. Two giant hands were squeezing my chest, preventing me from breathing. I felt certain I was the victim of a freak accident involving lightning or wiring. For no apparent reason the current suddenly withdrew from my upper body to my spinal cord. Then it moved simultaneously down my neck and up from the plantar region of my feet and concentrated at the base of my spine. It then more or less subsided altogether." Although the experience lasted about ten minutes, it seemed like an eternity. Afterwards she spent hours looking for an electrical problem in the house.

A day or two later, as she slept in the afternoon, the episode repeated itself, and thereafter the phenomenon increased steadily, soon occurring in waking as well as sleeping hours. She was fearful she was developing a disease of the nervous system. Soon she was having mental and visual experiences. She saw at times "radiant halos and weird luminous colored lights". In particular there was a round blue one that seemed to be a permanent part of her peripheral vision, following her around. She heard strange sounds such as the buzzing of thousands of bees, felt a snake-like movement up her spine or a flash like a lightning bolt on either the left or right side, with sensations of heat or cold, usually going through the head, and sometimes stopping at the brain. "It would be like being bathed in radiant energy and I was completely at the mercy of it. I felt like it was a higher intelligence. Sometimes I was paralyzed and I went out of my body."

Beth found the out-of-body experience nice at times, but worried she wouldn't come out of it and might die. She might be walking and feel hot energy sweep up through her body, see lovely beautiful lights, feel bliss, feel free of time and space, and sense her consciousness being attached to her body by only a thin thread.

For about six weeks she was struck with an energy experience several times a day while in class, or driving, working, or walking. Her whole body changed, her pulse raced and her heart pounded and she felt hungry all the time. She could barely eat enough and in one week she lost seven pounds. She would meet people and could know about them psychically, becoming confused between what they told her and what she already knew. Colors were more bright and intense and she would see lights, hear what seemed to be celestial singing, bells, and chimes. She felt people were in the room who were not there.

If she focused attention on her head, energy would go there and the results were unpredictable -- sometimes energy shot up powerfully, sometimes it was hot or cold, usually it was neutral. There was no pain. At times she felt a tearing sensation at the base of the spine but again there was no pain. She appeared to faint at times, and her skin would be clammy. At times her body shook and rocked as if a train was going by, and often it felt full of buzzing and electricity. If she relaxed or she talked about or thought about the energy it intensified. For several months she would sit in a chair each night at the same time and be flooded by the energy pouring upward and making her hair stand on end; she would be filled with bliss and waves of light, and feel an "irresistible smile". One night she felt the energy rise to her neck, and closing her eyes and looking inwards she saw "golden energy swirling incessantly around my organs". It seemed to move with determination and intelligence as if familiar with her anatomy, bathing her in a glistening sheen.

Anxiety and fear made her unable to concentrate and she flunked out of college, becoming very reclusive and barely able to function or sleep. She was nauseated all the time, often had the taste of copper in her mouth and her lips tingled. She had constant vertigo, even falling down once or twice. She had vibrating sensations on the top of her head and between her eyebrows and couldn't sleep much. There was often a sucking sensation around her cervix, as if vaginal fluid was needed by the energy. She often felt sexual arousal from the energy and at times the sensation of having a spontaneous orgasm lasting 10 or 15 minutes. Occasionally this was a mild sensation which lasted several hours.

Eventually she left her job at a nursing home, and her ego strength faded. "I felt I was not in control -- I was a servant at the mercy of this energy. I would swing from euphoria to depression."

The energy continued for two years, the most intense phases being the first few months. During the early months she also had a long series of dreams, many about nuclear war. Some foretold her meeting her future husband. Every night she received "a different gift of a vision of the future - extremely life-like, sort of symbolic and seeming to be in a whole different world". Two dreams included a unicorn, which brought happy feelings.

Beth did not seek professional help at this time, but a friend gave her Gopi Krishna's biography, which filled her with relief, and hope that she had no serious illness.

She wrote to him and he responded, and she eventually went to meet him in Europe. He told her the experience was genuine, and gave her basic advice about sleeping and eating right and being a good person. "It was helpful to have it confirmed." She says that although she felt isolated and lonely during the worst of the process, she felt she knew best about her body. It was important to figure it out for herself and come up with her own answers. "Even at the time I could look at it as if it were God but also as if it were an evolutionary process, or a higher knowledge or intelligence." She feels the awakening opened up a whole new world, adding a new dimension to her world view, and giving her life meaning.

Beth still has occasional experiences with the energy (14 years later) although they are mild, and when she was pregnant in later years the energy seemed to go away, except during the delivery when she shook all over. After years she now is able to relax and says she has "a little more faith, that it will take care itself and take care of me." She lives a quiet life with her husband and children, and works as a nurse.

Commentary on Diagnosing This Experience:

Although Beth had done some meditating and contemplating about spiritual life she followed no specific practices that could be said to lead to this dramatic spontaneous awakening, and relates no traumas that might account for the difficulty of it. She has many of the symptoms reported in the biographies in the literature, ranging from violent energy charges, hearing yogic sounds, precognitive and psychic abilities, emotional swings, visions of light and of the inner body, spontaneous sexual energy, and out-of-body and blissful samadhi-like experiences. It is impossible to judge why she would go through such an intense awakening, and it is easiest to surmise it must be related to samskaras or karmic destiny. She sees it as possibly related to a genetic readiness for this stage of evolution, and speculates that there is a biological source for the experience related to nucleic acid and DNA. She is one of the few subjects who has not followed a yogic path, or aligned herself with any teachers or traditions to continue the process, but was able to get the context and understanding she needed from Gopi Krishna. The most significant assistance she received was in reading his book, over and over, and realizing "that my experience was not unique and aberrant but belonged to a process recorded also by others." In the ensuing years as the process has abated she has put her focus on leading a balanced and integrated life, and finding service-oriented work.

Karen

Karen is a slim and graceful college professor in her early 40's, raised in the Midwest by intellectual parents, who were active in the Methodist church. She was sensitive as a child, always feeling herself to be different than other children. She reports that "As early as age three I was troubled by the suffering of others, and always had big questions, thinking deeply, much to the dismay of my parents." She worried about pollution, war and the needs of orphans. She also reports psychic experiences in childhood. Once she dreamed that the stables behind her house burned down, killing the horses, an event that soon occurred, leaving her anxious that she might somehow have been responsible. Years later she had a vision of the John Kennedy assassination the night before it occurred.

One summer in a high school camp worship service she had an "incredible sensation of someone's energy hands on my shoulder, communicating that I needed to come with him. I was overwhelmed and wept. I went out into nature. Later the counselors were upset and wanted to interpret the experience, but I couldn't hear them." A year later she had a similar experience, "as if a large energy body was touching me." Around this time she also had an out-of-body experience, seeing her body on the bed as if she had a dual-consciousness. "I remember feeling it was God holding my energy body up above my physical body, and I marveled at it. I felt I began to understand what some of the spiritual experiences were that people talked about." At age 9 Karen had glandular fever for three months. By age 14 she began having migraine headaches once or twice a year. These were preceded by an aura. As an adult she learned to deal with these by going to bed, playing "passage music into another realm and just going into a deep state of rest. What I learned was not to fight the energies, and to go with them. I let myself float with them into a more expanded environment."

After college graduation Karen married and moved to the west coast. She met a woman who was a follower of Yogananda and practiced Kriya Yoga, and she began to study the Self-Realization Fellowship courses and do visualizations, which she found exceptionally easy. But she eventually gave up this interest because her husband was not interested.

Early in her marriage Karen had three children and she was deeply engaged in the tasks of parenting. She also began Jungian analysis, did group therapy processes, had some acupuncture treatments and began lucid dreaming. While doing a process during a workshop one night she began spontaneous rapid breathing, felt she was about to jump into an abyss, and saw an image of a door opening and something beckoning her through. "I knew I couldn't go through or I would die." During the workshop her energy changed, and each day it felt as if something new changed in her body. A white eagle appeared in a vision as a guide, and she felt something running across her body. She had a sense of coming out of the experience carrying a globe of light, and as she walked barefoot with the globe, a snake slithered across her toes and she felt she was crossing a threshold of fear.

"As I walked into the woods alone I could feel the texture and energy of each living thing. I heard something calling to me. I looked ahead and saw it was a huge boulder. Rationally, I thought that could not be, but the sense was unmistakable. I laid down on it prone, arms outstretched, for a long time. Then I knew I had to hug a tree. After this I felt I could return to the people at the workshop. This was a very big opening, a complete confrontation with fear."

When she returned to the workshop she could barely speak. When asked by the leaders what was going on she simply said "I was called upon by that very big boulder." They told her the Dalai Lama had been there a few months earlier and identified the boulder as the center point of a vortex of energy for the entire Northwest -- a power spot, and an ancient Indian ceremonial spot.

A few years later a major physical problem triggered another deep psychic experience. She suffered from an intensely painful illness in her right eye, when the cornea eroded and raw nerves were exposed. She never knew if she would be able to see when she awoke in the morning. She went into a depression, believing everything was being taken from her. Her eyes were taped shut for two weeks as even the slightest movement caused excruciating pain. This seemed to trigger profound inner visions, and holographic dreams with multiple perspectives. Once she woke up to see everything in the room very clearly, forgetting her eyes were taped shut.

Some time later she met a man with whom she felt an instant affinity and energy connection and they began a long term relationship. Her first intense experiences of energy awakening occurred with him. The initial experience happened following a long day of love-making, feeling the rising of energy moving through them as in tantric practices, which she did not know at the time. During these hours they felt incredible energy and saw visions, one of which was a clear blue single eye.

That night they were sleeping in a vacation home on a small island when he awakened with a dream of small entities who were outside the house wanting to come in. He dreamed that he told them to leave but they came into the room anyway, and that he ran to the bedroom door and slammed it. As he did so the actual door in the bedroom slammed shut and woke both of them. As he told Karen this dream she felt a wave of fear and she recalled the same vision she had seen years earlier at the workshop of the door opening and someone beckoning through. The knob on the bedroom door turned and the door opened and light poured through. "Suddenly all of my energy was thrown down to the base of my spine and then built upward. As the energy rose, my body arched back. Deep breathing patterns took over, came all the way up and over my head and through my mouth, and I screamed an incredibly loud high-pitched sound. When the sound stopped, the door slammed shut. During this experience my lover saw light energy forms spinning around in a whirl, and then saw an enormous eagle sweep up and over our heads as the sound was made. After the door shut the space was clear and very still. We began to repeat a mantra -- a rune in which you invoke the power of light -- which we knew vaguely, until light came through the skylight above us in the morning."

After this whenever the two were together Karen experienced strange body phenomena. "It felt like the original experience was a preparing of my body to tolerate energy, to learn to tolerate pleasure and bliss. As the energy continued it felt as if my body was getting remade, every cell being restructured. The feeling was often like a vibratory frequency working through every part of my body." She began having kinesthetic dreams, where an image would be given to her and she would hold on to the image while her body would have physical sensations and unfold in movements as in a dream. With this unfolding "whole chunks of awareness and knowledge would be there -- cosmic glimpses of relationship to the cosmic plan." After the original opening the couple, who lived in separate countries, met every two months, always experiencing tremendous body energy and synchronistic experiences, and simultaneously remembering what seemed to be past lives. They experienced visions and dreams in common, even when sleeping a continent apart.

During this period she often became ill with flu-like symptoms of nausea and malaise following time with her lover and returning to her habitual life, but gradually she learned how not to get sick. "I set some intentionality. My body was so open and beginning to reject some of the energy patterns in my day-to-day life that were not okay for me. I asked that I not have to suffer that particular illness, that I find a way to hold it and integrate the experience in my body. After a year I didn't get sick."

One day, while alone in a hotel room in Europe, she fell down on the bed and felt she was leaving her body and dying. "My head felt like the vessels in it were going to burst and my breath changed. It came on so unexpectedly I thought I was dying. I was aware my body didn't want to die since it was gripping life with such tenacity. A female guide came to me and told me that 'the leaving is not the dying' and that I needed to learn to love without attachment. I went into a deep hypnogogic state, and she introduced me to knowledge which she said I had once given to her. She offered me deep affirmation for the inner work I was doing and told me lovingly that I needed to distinguish between earth plane affections and attachments, and my larger purpose here as a being from another dimension. I had to learn to sustain the light and to not distract myself by recording everything that happened to me. I became profoundly aware that the description is not the experience. She told me that when the whole body energy moves to a point of light above my head my consciousness is connected to another plane."

In 1987, also in a hotel room, she experienced vibrations and tremors through her legs, spine, and face and performed yoga asanas spontaneously for three hours. Energy rushed first up the right side of her body, and then moved up the left side. Then her entire body was shaken by energy streaming upward and vibrations. She went into a prayer position with her head down, pulling at her hair and saying "I used to be bald". It felt as if the energy wanted to do things with her body that she was unable to do. "I pulled at my face as if my body was not light enough. It felt strange to have this 'funny' body. I felt I was almost taken 'home' several times, and experienced deep grief over being here (on this planet). I was aware of having had a previous body, a light form. I knew this other body could move easily and do anything. I was pulled into extreme postures, -- underneath, backward and curled forward, and then began rocking. Then I fell entirely backward and upside down, my fingers rigid, and I went into a head stand against the wall, my head between my knees. Then I stood up with a full body vibration and went forward to the ground. I was surprised to see little red lights flashing as well as a soft yellow peripheral glow. I felt extreme heat, and heard crying which turned to laughter. Then I realized it was my own voice but I didn't know if I was laughing or crying. I heard the words 'siddha yoga', and my head jerked from side to side. I distinctly felt I needed to keep my spine open. My stomach was upset. I coughed often, and then felt cold. Then I had a sense of a butterfly body living within me as if my body was its cocoon. It seemed to break out as a new body through my back, with still wet wings beginning to unfold. I found myself making loud, high, sustained sounds." After this event she was very vulnerable for a few days, and her body felt slow, delicate and vibratory.

A year later she had great pain in her left big toe, which hurt all afternoon and became increasingly worse, swelling until she could barely walk. She began laughing and crying at the same time. She tried to work with the energy and "felt it kick off in my body. I kept cradling the toe, saying 'my baby, poor baby'. Heat came up through my body and an unusual breathing pattern took over. Then I had phlegm in my throat and began growling and pawing at the floor. I found myself saying 'I am a leopard;

I'm a South-American leopard'. I felt I was hanging onto life by toenails and fingernails."

She felt embodied as this animal, growling and moving to clear her energy. Her body went into postures, some of which choked her, and she felt like vomiting. It seemed to her that she must clear her body of all impediments for the light and energy to go through. She became aware of the need to take spiritual practices seriously, and made tones which cleared the higher chakras, causing energy to move upward. She began meditating, and saw beautiful crystals, growing like corals, and standing before them groups of frail, bald beings of light -- "my people." She had a realization that inner dialogue distracts from experiences, and "wherever you put attention is where energy is." Then her energy felt more like silk -- warm, and rising. A period of ecstasy and bliss followed.

During another period she felt heat coursing through her body, and her hands and feet tingled with electrical charges and burned for five days. Afterwards it seemed as if "a healer was working through my body. The energy would rise when I was around anyone who had a problem, I would feel the energy move through my palms and fingertips and if I allowed it to, it would intensify and find a way to work with the energy of the person I was with. I would always say a prayer that the energy would be used for the highest good." During this time she caused a surgical scar to fade, warts to fall off of someone's foot, and stopped a nose bleed instantly. This experience continued for about six weeks, and then receded into the background after she stopped responding to it, although she suspects it could be summoned back by simply remembering that she can call on it.

Karen continued to feel a cellular changing and restructuring of her body. Sometimes at night a radiation-like energy pours through her. Some nights it feels as if she leaves her body and goes out into the stars. Once she felt drawn to leave and not return, and was awakened by a phone call from her lover who said "I felt you were going away." At another time she had a major dream in which "I dreamed of myself as a vertical shaft of light, surrounded by layers of different colored lights and energy wraps unfolding in a spiral and coming off."

In August of 1987 she had what she calls a "star-body" experience, after awakening at night in her bedroom at home, and not knowing where she was or who she was with. She could see outlines in the room but didn't recognize anything. She saw her husband but couldn't think of who he was, and she felt out of her body. She knew who she was in her larger self and had no fear, but felt a sense of having forgotten her particular identity in this time and space. "I knew that I couldn't just radiate this genuine loving energy to people, that they wouldn't understand or be able to receive this unconditional love as love. It was as if the human form seemed to elicit a need for a particular personalized form of love -- that until an individual totally recognized who he/she was, his or her ego still needed to be acknowledged as an individual. I had to work hard to remember the seemingly insignificant differences between people so that they would believe they were seen for themselves; it seemed such a limited condition of receptivity for love. At the same time I felt tenderness for the human condition of embodiment, and witnessed my own body snuggling up to the body next to me for a kind of human animal comfort and warmth. Gradually I was able to recall the particulars of this life and my husband next to me, without losing the exquisite consciousness of the other dimension."

Karen has experienced many other movements of energy and awareness, some of them during or following sexual involvement. She feels energy rocket up from the first chakra at times, causing her whole body to vibrate and shake. Sometimes she arches backward and her head goes almost upside down beneath her, or her shoulder blades are pulled together as if they want to touch. The body will lock into such postures for a period of time and then release. Waves of energy and heat and unusual breathing patterns occur. She sometimes feels the energy stuck at the top of her head unless she is free to make sounds. "Something about sound is for me utterly central to moving energy." Sometimes fist-size balls of energy roll upward through the spine, pushing through the center of her head or slightly to the left. She has fallen into raptures and ecstatic states, and spontaneously performed what she later learned to be mudras. The first mudra she performed was that of equanimity, where the hands are held out palms upward.

Karen continues to work, raise her family, and balance the demands of her Kundalini experience, and two significant relationships. She sometimes follows a macrobiotic diet, but at other times wants to eat meat. She has had several years of Jungian analysis and participates in other psychological and spiritual programs. But she does not engage in regular meditation practice since she can go into such deep states and the experiences demand attention that she feels she must allocate to her family.

When asked how this process has impacted her life she stated "I think I've changed dramatically from believing in the connectedness of all beings to knowing it. The presence of 'God' is no longer a question for me, and God isn't anthropomorphic anymore. God is here in every cell of every creation. At a deep level I feel more secure in life because I've reached a source of truth -- a quality of truth about the nature of our beingness. . .I don't feel that there is anything I absolutely 'have to do' in this life -- I used to fret and worry about that. My compassion has grown -- expanded in depth and breadth. Much of what I feel is not so personal anymore. I am not so concerned about 'personal little me'. It's like being a cell of a larger organism, a small part of a vast mind. I feel more committed to a spiritual life. It's the most important dimension of consciousness, living this spark of Spirit in the gift of incarnation. I no longer seem to engage in searching and longing for so much; every cell is informed with the divine."

Commentary on Diagnosing this Experience:

Although these experiences sound extreme and dramatic, Karen carries a presence that is gentle, centered and loving, and she is extremely capable in her roles as a mother and teacher. She is passionate and intense and often exhausted by the emotional demands of her life, but is much more stable than a review of this history might suggest to the observer who hasn't met her. She has a strong capacity to witness and accept the volatile energy, and the visions and dreams that come to her, along with the conflict of her life circumstances.

Karen's history demonstrates the correlation between certain kinds of intense emotional and sexual involvement and the awakening of the latent energies, which can take a couple mutually into transpersonal realms of experience. There is clearly a powerful link between Karen and her lover and both of them have most likely awakened this energy and used it to expand their range of energy and psychic awareness.

She demonstrates every level of the Kundalini experience including samadhi states, pranic activity, physical problems, involuntary asanas, visions, extrasensory perceptions and psychic and healing abilities. We can also see stages in this process similar to those of many cases, with early signs of sensitivity and psychic openness, preliminary experiences of energetic and psychic openings, followed by a more dramatic experience some years later. She is engaged in intense personal conflicts and pressures that may make the Kundalini experience more difficult than if she were living a quieter, ashram-style life, yet she has a great sense of acceptance and attunement to the path with which she is presently engaged.

Mark

Mark, born in the South in 1925, had many traumatic early childhood losses. His biological mother died at his birth, and an aunt he was greatly bonded to and who was his caretaker died when he was seven. When he was 12 the uncle he lived with separated from his second wife, to whom Mark had become attached. At this time he went back to live with his biological father, who had led a transient life. He had nine older brothers and sisters and never fit well into the family. He left home as a teenager, went into the Air Corps in World War l, worked and eventually made his way through college, then became a teacher. During his youth he had two automobile accidents, and once fell out of the box car of a train, all causing damage to the right side of his body. He was later told by a chiropractor that his back was "zig-zag curved".

Mark married late in life and when the marriage broke up a few years later he was deeply wounded and depressed. He experimented with Gestalt therapy, bodywork, and group therapy, and attended an intensive group process for several weeks that promoted deep introspection. He became even more depressed at this time, withdrew from therapy and worked alone with his dreams. He used marijuana frequently, feeling it "helped to interiorize my experience and relate to parts of myself that had been repressed".

About this time Mark practiced meditation for about two months by sitting and following his thoughts daily. Then he heard about Muktananda and went to Oakland to meet him. In the darshan line he was introduced to him, and they spent about 15 seconds talking. As he left he took a poster of Muktananda with him. He placed it on his altar at home, focused attention on it in meditation. Beside it were two candles, and beads from the bark of a Tulsa tree. He would smoke marijuana to deepen his meditation on the poster, and see 20 or 30 faces in it, especially seeing the images of three women in Muktananda's face -- a young girl, a young woman and an older mother. He would practice this after doing exercises in the morning, and he turned his exercise more toward yoga asanas, especially the Salute to the Sun. One morning he felt a tug at the end of his right finger as he did this asana, and then as he bent over one leg the muscle contracted under his right knee. He leaned over his left leg to get more leverage. Suddenly his right hand grasped the leg and yanked it. It was so painful his mouth flew open to scream, and out of his mouth came a soft sound "ta". (He was later told this is an ancient mantra.)

Mark was terribly frightened by this experience, although at the same time he felt the soft sound and ritual movement was in some sense trying to help him. He began to experience more ritualized uncontrollable spasms and movements, usually on the right side of his body, and to perform asanas involuntarily. He became paranoid about these episodes, feeling he was possessed. He sought help from past-lives therapists and mediums, believing something was trying to take him over, and felt very negative, fearful and uncertain. He submitted to the strange movements because he feared that if he didn't something awful would happen.

A month after this experience Mark felt the energy force move him to throw away the marijuana in the kitchen, give away the liquor in the liquor cabinet, and take the necklace he had used as part of his ritual and flush it down the commode. He then knocked the candles down from the altar and demolished the whole thing. He felt panic about this and stopped meditating. He kept a daily journal, and he continued to seek out people who could tell him what was happening. A psychic told him it was Kundalini, and suggested it was related to God and he should surrender to it. He felt a contradiction between the beneficent experience she described and the bizarre movements he had.

He felt desperate to change his life and didn't know how. He had already tried a number of group processes, Esalen, and individual therapy and it seemed nothing had helped. Something was pushing him. He had became more and more dissatisfied and the marijuana had come from desperation. He felt prepared to do anything. He began meditating for three hours a day beginning at 4 a.m. One morning his attention was drawn to the phone number at the bottom of the Muktananda poster, and he called the center and heard a talk on Siddha meditation. When he heard that they recommended meditating 20 minutes a day, he put a huge clock on the table, feeling he had been in perversion of real meditation. He called a therapist who was a devotee of Muktananda. She told him he was experiencing Kundalini and it was out of control. This terrified him and he imagined a conspiracy between her and Muktananda. She told him to call the retreat center in New York and they could help, and reluctantly he did so. He talked to a secretary and when he called back for a message he was told "The Kundalini will take you there. Come to the Intensive." He feels this became the story of his subsequent travels. He hoped the intensive "would give me a cure or get things under control, but I felt I might lose my sexual energy for myself and if so I would die".

Shortly after this decision he began to have experiences of feeling frozen in movement, such as standing in the shower until the water became ice cold. Once, in a restaurant, when he tried to get up his right arm flew out but his body would not move. Finally with help he pitched over on his right side, and then could not get up. A doctor was called who came and worked with him for an hour and a half, using imagery, guiding him with his hand at the base of the spine. Finally Mark got up, did some mudras, and blessed everyone in the restaurant.

At the intensive in New York he reports "I came in and sat down and keeled over. I was given sweets, and felt warmth, friendly faces and reassurance. Then I went upstairs and performed a ritual, pouring water over my head. I gravitated between terror and exultation. In the hall when Muktananda came to me I began shaking. Muktananda's peacock feather struck me on the right side and I crouched over like an animal." He loved the chanting and music of the program and felt as if he were in a magic hall at times, but when he left fears and anxiety would hit him. Although Muktananda was not to do darshan at this time except with children, Mark implored the coordinator to let him in, so she did. "I was struck with the thought 'Accept ye be as little children ye can not enter the kingdom of heaven' as I stood in line behind the children, and when I reached Muktananda I was no longer afraid. I knelt and raised my right arm above my head. Muktananda said to come closer and he looked in my eyes for a few seconds. Then I returned to my place on the floor and began to feel internal snake-like movements. A smooth soft feeling moved up from my fingertips and my agitation ceased. I reached out to hold hands with the black and white men on either side of me, searching for family. The white man curled up in a fetal position to avoid me, and some helpers in the hall came over. But I said loudly that Muktananda wanted me to do this and they went away. Then my hand stopped moving, and I cried, and said 'I tried, I could only save one of them'".

On the bus going home from the ashram Mark tried to touch everyone, and believes this came out of a desire to help them. He behaved similarly on the streets of New York, touching and blessing people. "I saw terrible faces in the clouds above the city. As the cab drove to the airport the hood flew up, and I freaked out, paid the driver with all of my money and walked the rest of the way. I was very confused at the airport and had the wrong ticket, and then I collapsed onto the floor at the counter. Finally a stewardess got a ticket for me and helped me into a first class seat on the plane."

As the plane took off he had the impression that he was being" zapped" by people who were controlled by evil spirits, whenever they pointed something at him i.e. an elbow, knee, or toe. He had a bible, and opened it to the chapter on three temptations. He drew pictures of Muktananda and of tabernacles from Jewish stories, which made him feel protected. To stop the evil spirits he leaned toward a girl with his hand like a cobra, and did the same to the man behind him and another with a newspaper. Then he leaned over and did a karate chop to a man's groin. When the stewardess came over he said "I was doing my meditation and they bugged me" in a child-like voice. An inner voice said he would be arrested for assault or incarcerated for a mental check. When nothing happened all his social expectations of how things should be fell apart, scaring him even more. "I didn't know how to deal with a world in which anything could happen."

After a friend picked him up at the airport he settled down. The support of this person was very important, as he assumed it was an emotional problem he was going through. For the next few weeks he slept only two hours a day and went through a number of psychotic-like episodes. One of these experiences occurred between 2 and 3 a.m. "I woke up and went through my house to separate the good guys from the bad guys, sorting through shoes, records and other items. By 10 a.m. the whole house was divided, and I zapped the bad guys. Another time he awoke and went out on the patio in his shorts. He was "assisting in the dying of Muktananda". He wrote the time in pencil on concrete. Anything that moved was experienced as an enemy. He performed rituals until 5 p.m. when he had a dinner engagement. At one point he heard his voice sounding like a boy saying "Come on and die man -- I have things to do."

His ex-wife called and advised him to go to a massage and healing center in the mountains. He went for several days, where he relaxed in a nature setting, using a pool and hot tubs. People recognized his need to be touched and did massage with him. One woman did Trager massage, which he feels opened his heart.

After this Mark realized increasingly that he wanted to work with his hands, and saw how unhappy he was as a teacher. He became aware of the desire to touch, as well as to be in nature with people, and work with the body. He still felt fear about his body but at another level felt more accepting. He began to release inhibitions and accept the aesthetic and sexual needs of his body, rather than judging them. He decided to study massage and Trager work. This proved difficult at first because his body, particularly the right side, would spontaneously go into movements he could not control. He stopped taking classes for several years, realizing he needed more grounding and to integrate his experiences. He visited psychics and therapists and felt none were very helpful, that he had to find the answers within himself.

Following these initial experiences, Mark began to exhibit a wide range of physical symptoms and frequently underwent testing at Kaiser Hospital. He felt if he could prove something physical was the matter they could fix it. Neurologists observed his spontaneous movements but their tests were negative. One doctor called it myelonic movement (involuntary movements with a physical cause in the brain), and ordered a brain scan. At one point he was referred to an oncologist because an x-ray found a mass in his right lung. The surgeon who was to do a biopsy decided there was not enough evidence to justify it. He was told his problems were emotional, and given a prescription for Haldol. He took one of these and nothing happened, and he decided he would need a massive dose if there was to be an effect so he stopped them completely.

During one phase he had difficulties with his heart. He would wake up at night convinced he was not breathing and unable to detect a heart beat. He would stamp his feet and pound his chest, thinking he was dying. He had chest pains and tightness, felt constriction in his chest while jogging and went through cardiac testing, again with no diagnosis.

Other conditions he has experienced are :

-- Agitation and a burning sensation in his right toe with his foot turning out and pressing the ground; feeling as if lightning is flashing down his leg.

-- Constant internal pressure that causes pains and body spasms. Sometimes he shakes from head to toe; this movement is now more smooth and integrated than before, and it is felt mainly in the neck and head.

-- Feeling as if ants are crawling over him.

-- His arms raising and his hands tracing movement of the energy as it circulates in a spiral in his body.

-- The lobes of his skull becoming very sore and soft as if he could poke his finger through them.

-- Getting stuck in a trance-like state until someone or something releases it. Occasionally while driving his eyes are fixed ahead and they "glaze over" for a few moments.

-- Numbness and extreme cold in his toes and fingers, especially on his right hand. His fingertips turn yellow or white and this might last for three hours until they turn purple and come back to normal. He was tested for diseases of the lymph system because of the extreme temperature difference between his left and right side. He also has felt burning sensations on his feet, especially his right toe, and at times extreme tolerance of heat. Once he burned his skin with a hot pad and did not feel it.

-- He had endema with swelling that came and went spontaneously.

-- Sometimes he spins in circles with his hands held together as in prayer and he feels this is an attempt to find a new balance: for awhile this happened two or three times a week, at the time of the interview it happened about every two days.

-- Once the energy pushed him against a rock and adjusted his vertebrae and aligned his back. He believes when the energy wants him to take over it will cause pain. When he is uncertain what to do he starts the 23rd psalm and "all movement ceases if it wants me to take over".

-- He sings old songs or whistles involuntarily, and makes monosyllabic sounds such as "ta"; hearing the words "peace", "God" or "God be with you".

-- He feels easily susceptible to the energy of others when getting massage or bodywork, and often sees colors, especially orange and yellow in a swirling mass as if he is looking into a fire.

Mark has not experienced many visual phenomena, but once, early in the process, he saw light within as if there were no outer skin covering the body. He saw, with his eyes open, channels of energy with a flash of silver running across.

During his struggle to integrate this process Mark realized how unhappy he was with his work and finally retired to spend time studying massage and other forms of bodywork. He is trying to shift from an intellectual orientation to a holistic view of life, and to find his ideal work. He still has many symptoms but they rarely occur in public. He practices hatha yoga and some meditation. He finds that staying physically active, being in nature, and putting his focus on what he is doing in the moment are very useful practices in managing the energy. In addition to hatha yoga he feels the most helpful kinds of bodywork have been acupressure and Trager work, in the hands of a competent and sensitive person who understands the energy. He felt Rolfing and Polarity Therapy were not helpful. Massage is relaxing. But none of these can make the energy go away. When he feels relief from bodywork, which he says releases negativity, and the energy comes back afterwards, he knows the work "is something only the energy can do....The bodywork will open a channel and the energy start moving as if a gate has opened."

He has had many significant dreams involving women, and has felt woman doctors and therapists to be the most responsive and supportive in his process. His views of women have changed and he sees them more as helping him relate to the feminine part of himself, rather than as sexual objects, which he did in the past. Other changes are in recognizing his need to accept people and "be with them in a more spacious and free environment". Also he says "I needed to become more responsible for my behavior and my anger. I believe much creative energy is channeled through anger and I want to transform that form so it can be used."

Commentary On Diagnosing This Experience:

Mark has had the most persistent and painful problems with Kundalini of anyone I have interviewed, although I have talked with several other people briefly who reported a similar ordeal. He is unique in that bliss seems elusive and snatches of light, peace and understanding are rare. He has experienced more paranoia in response to this experience than other subjects. He has all the physical manifestation of Kundalini awakening, and has been racked emotionally, primarily with fear, doubt and anxiety regarding the uncontrollable movements and pain in his body. His opening occurred without any systematic preparation and while using marijuana. Somehow the shaktipat experience, blended with mental confusion and an already depressive and despairing frame of mind, allowed the opening, but did not nurture it in any way.

I theorize that the tremendous psychological losses of his early life, loneliness, significant injuries to his right back, lack of context for or understanding of eastern spirituality, leftover anxieties from Southern Baptist religious beliefs, and the use of marijuana created a fog of fear and confusion that simply swamped him in the early stages of the process. He was a thinking and analytical person, not in touch with his body or emotions, and desperately seeking something he knew was missing. This experience plunged him into his shadow and he has struggled for years since to come to terms with his body, emotions and relationship needs. It is as if two sides of his psyche have been in hand-to-hand combat throughout this process giving him no opportunity for bliss, surrender, ecstasy, or the other potential boons it offers.

Mark is getting in touch with his feminine side, softening, searching for his wholeness. He believes now that he is in a spiritual process, but he understandably views it as closer to hell than to heaven. It has clearly brought immense change and growth in his philosophy and self-awareness. He cites both bodywork and nature as nurturing for him during this process.

Jay

Jay, a 34-year old self-employed consultant, is a personable, easy-going, educated man who has practiced Transcendental Meditation for 14 years, beginning when he was earning an MA in business. He is the son of Jewish parents, raised without much religious influence in the home other than attending a Sunday school he hated. He rejected religious practices. He is the youngest of three children. Although there were tensions in the family there were no significant childhood traumas that he recalls. He is bisexual, and has been in a long-term relationship with a woman but never married. He had a six-month period of intense drug use in 1971, using mostly marijuana and hallucinogens, which he says he probably took 50 or 60 times. The first twenty times he used mescaline or LSD the experience was gentle and pleasant, but it then became very frightening in terms of fear of death. He felt his heart would burst. He gave up drug use but for the following year and a half had recurring anxiety attacks. In college a counselor advised him to face them head on and they would go away, which helped him eliminate them.

He began meditating in college, and found meditation practice quiet and enjoyable the first few years. He learned a few asanas and one pranayama technique but seldom practiced them. Looking back on his experiences he believes it is possible that an event in 1976, following four years of meditation, may have begun his Kundalini process. He was at a three-month TM retreat, and felt at a plateau in his practice. He had a light case of flu and took extra time to rest, having a massage to relieve the aches. Two meditation periods later he felt blocked and then "I felt suddenly as if I had broken through a layer of ice and could feel myself dangling above an ocean of bliss, feeling my toes touching it, experiencing intense thrills, warm, flowing from my toes up my body, flowing everywhere. I was plunged into this ocean of bliss, and then I lost awareness of what was happening; it was indescribable." His meditations continued to plunge him into bliss for several days afterward but outside of meditation he was gripped by anxiety -- a tremendous fear would overcome him about an hour after meditation, twice a day, whenever he had the bliss experience. He laid down on the floor in his room to get his bearings before getting dressed to leave. At the time he assumed these symptoms were a release of the old drug experience from his body.

This continued for three days. He does not think he was sleeping at night, although he would wake up feeling refreshed. He kept asking people "Is this real -- am I really here talking to you?" He felt no tangible sense of reality. He had known of the spiritual experience of detachment conceptually, so he felt it was not to be worried about, yet he felt frightened at the lack of connection with people. After three days he was back to normal.

The next time he attended an extended retreat he heard on several occasions a loud noise that sounded as if it originated from somewhere in his spine and rose to his head. He felt a dramatic physical movement up the spine at the time. He had felt small jerky movements of his hands or legs occasionally before, but this was more intense, and yet he isn't sure the body moved or if it just seemed like it did. During the next years he sometimes heard a roaring ring beginning at a low intensity and rising to a high pitched ringing sound in his head, lasting five to ten seconds, and he would feel smaller body movements and a small internal thud occasionally.

In 1979, Jay attended a two-week retreat, where he learned the TM "flying technique", or levitation. He had observed others "going nuts" with these practices before, making noises, shaking, and bouncing around and he had felt there were getting carried away, and could have controlled it. While doing these practices and in a deep state of meditation he felt disturbed by someone moaning. It was so loud that he felt pulled out of his blissful meditative state and he felt slightly annoyed. Suddenly he realized it was him moaning, and felt "this can't be happening, I should have control over myself." It was a very sexual sound, and he was flooded with rapturous, orgasmic sensations, and drooling on himself. It was the first time he had such an experience and had been conscious of it and stayed with it. It became more and more intense, very active in a subtle way. "The vibrations felt like a spring was getting compressed so that the spring was growing, as if potential energy in the body was getting more and more powerful so when it would let go it would really let go. I felt energy and warmth building in the solar plexus, building and building -- until it popped open. It felt like intense radiation moving out and up at the same time and I was flying -- bouncing and bouncing." He burst out laughing uncontrollably, his body felt very light. As energy moved into his head he felt light, like a glow, his whole body felt it was glowing. This lasted about an hour.

Following this event he felt continual blissful energy. When he sat to meditate the process would continue, always beginning with the groaning, the building sensation, and breaking loose. It felt like a "cosmic orgasm". The rising occurred in meditation, or while sleeping, and soon happened in public as well.

At night he woke up with strange sensations, especially in his legs, which he felt he needed to kick hard. Sometimes he was warm and flushed. He had drenching night sweats, so heavy he would have to change the bedding several times a night.

He dreamt of being in a store with a shopkeeper -- "someone I recognized and could not quite place. As I dreamed, I started to wake up and the nausea was there. It moved up to the throat and I made a groaning noise; my head felt as if it were filled with a porous material like a sponge. The nausea moved up and penetrated all the pores. It felt like an uncomfortable warm fluid. My body became tense everywhere, as if preparing to burst, as if something were pushing through. I shook and groaned, and I couldn't control it, but could only wait for the experience to pass." After this, similar episodes occurred periodically about twice a week for a month or more. Today, seven years later, they occur every four to six months, usually lasting one or two minutes. Sometimes he feels only a preliminary "spaced-out" sensation and nausea but it subsides, although usually the whole process follows.

In 1983 he experienced severe headaches and extreme fatigue, and had a recurrence of extreme night sweats. The headaches began at the temples, radiating into the top of the head, and were extremely painful. He saw several doctors including a chiropractor, acupuncturist, holistic practitioner, Homeopath and Ayurvedic physician. He tried white flower oil on his head, and could not tell whether it helped or aggravated the headaches. Acupuncture made the headaches less severe but did not help the fatigue or night sweats. He used an Ayurvedic treatment of drinking a mixture of many herbs in fresh almond milk, eating asparagus root candy, making minor dietary changes, and getting Ayurvedic massages with sesame oil with garlic cooked in it. In about six weeks he felt better with the headaches diminished and the night sweats less frequent. After this, he slowly regained strength. He still has occasional night sweats, but they are not so severe. Recently they increased again and he saw an acupuncturist for treatment, who needled two points in his body that released sweating. He hasn't had the problem since.

Jay is presently feeling an upswing, although with a tendency to fall asleep in meditation. He is alert and energetic during the day. Sometimes he awakes in the night with little flashing bolts of white light in his head, which feel expanded beyond his skull. Sometimes he wakes up with a white or golden glow above him, penetrating down into his head, which he sees before his eyes, or off to the side, always inside his head. Twice, he awakened from sleep about 2 a.m. feeling a sweet and tender glow from the top of his head, dripping down like honey, seeing visions and feeling great sweetness in the heart area. He describes this as a wonderful, delicate and delicious feeling beyond description. It lasted about a half hour.

Another condition he has noticed since the opening is that when he has sex he feels a warm trembling vibration at the muladhara and below the naval, and he will laugh uncontrollably. He feels sexual energy in his whole body and may shake or go into kriyas, or into an involuntary yoga posture.

Jay reports no major emotional upheavals related to this process, although he feels listless and fatigued periodically. It has not interfered with establishing a successful business, and he feels the clients he needs are always there with little promotion on his part. On the whole the experience influenced him primarily at the spiritual level. "It woke me up to the possibilities of what spiritual experience was like and made my drive to spirituality much stronger. It is my main goal now, and I try to make everything in life fit it. It opened me to look outside the system I was in (TM) which was a big change -- emotionally and conceptually -- I had to, because Maharishi hadn't talked of these things."

He has not experienced many visual or psychic phenomena. Once he saw a vision of a "being" in meditation and said "What is this?" It answered "a Being of Light". He has noticed in the past year, after a class in Neuro-Linguistic Programming, that he may have some capacity to visualize. He went to an aura reading workshop and learned that by looking at auras in the mind's eye (creating pictures in the mind) instead of seeing them actually around people, he could identify an aura and pick up impressions of people or things that seem accurate. Sometimes he gets images of someone's past life and can describe it in detail. He believes it is impossible to tell if someone is right or wrong about such things, and is not attached to this kind of experience. He does feel he has a strong sense of what to do in his life, and trusts that good things are coming.

Commentary on Diagnosing This Experience:

Jay may have experienced most closely what a yogic adept might be expected to experience with Kundalini -- being plunged into the process while practicing intense, sustained meditation, and doing advanced yogic practices. His physical difficulties -- primarily night sweats and headaches, the moaning, bouncing and energetic phenomena -- as well as the up and down mood swings, the two-stages of opening, and the continuity of his experience are typical of Kundalini patterns. He reports no occult powers or personality changes subsequent to this opening, and it is difficult to assess its impact on his lifestyle because he was already engaged in the transitions of completing college and getting established in the world during these years.

He has not had emotional trauma or serious physical difficulties due to Kundalini, perhaps because he had a strong context and support system for the experience, even though the organization that initiated the process did not adequately educate him about it. This seems typical of much western yogic training. The TM tradition is one of integrating spiritual practices and everyday western lifestyles, which is what he seems to be doing well.

Rob

Born in 1933, Rob was the eldest of two sons of upper-class Christian Scientists living in the Midwest, who practiced healing frequently in their family life. His feelings about church were indifferent, but he was taught to see spiritual values in a context that viewed the material plane and evil as non-existent, and that people were made in the image of God. At age 16 he was in a motorcycle accident and his leg was completely shattered, the bones splintered. It was put in a cast while doctors waited to decide what surgery to do, and Christian Science healers and his parents worked on it for a week. When he returned to the doctors all of the bones were back in place.

In college Rob became disenchanted with religion, and became angry at God for not attuning him to the hard sciences. He plunged seriously into intellectual pursuits and resisted any spiritual teachings. He believes now that he often had energetic phenomena in his body at this time, which he ignored and suppressed. He went into the military, then moved to the West coast and earned an MBA in business, and worked for major corporations until starting his own business years later.

In 1965 his interest in psychology, abandoned in college, reemerged and he began attending workshops and programs. In 1968, when he was 35, Rob attended a lecture given by Bernie Gunther, who taught tantric energy exercises using breath, color and sound. As he listened to Gunther talk of energy he had an "Aha!" experience, recognizing that he had been in touch with this energy, and he began doing the practices recommended for expanding it. He next attended a program on eastern energy perceptions which led him to take the Self-Realization correspondence program through Yogananda's organization. He began doing energization exercises and meditating regularly. But he resisted the teachings, convinced they weren't right for him. In 1970 he attended a meditation program, and while sitting in the audience meditating his body felt like it was exploding. He felt on fire, his skin prickling all over.

In 1971 he began TM meditation, and began a regular practice that included some tantric exercises, stretching and energizing exercises, visualizing white light, doing chakra cleansing exercises, and activating the medulla and third eye centers. He meditated for 20 minutes two times a day. In 1973 he enrolled in the Course In Miracles, which helped him resolve some of the philosophical split he had between material and non-material reality, giving him a new perception regarding a spiritual path. Before this time, he had sought scientific reasons for the energetic phenomena he felt. These phenomena increased as he meditated. He felt at times as if his skin was rolling back on his head, with intense energy gathered at various chakras, and sometimes having tingling sensations and pressure or contraction of the chakras. On some occasions he felt tremendous activity at the forehead and crown chakra, as if his head were opening, and prickly sensations at all points of his body.

He became interested in Carlos Castenada's books, a series of Shamanic adventures in Mexico, and traveled to the Yucatan. While touring Mayan and Aztec ruins, visiting pyramids and sacred pools, he had many altered-state experiences, such as being charged with ecstatic energy while standing over the site of an ancient high altar (and not knowing until later it was there). Walking on the beach at night he saw a crow pass over the moon, flying rapidly downward at about 60 m.p.h. He wanted a photo of it and focused his mental energy on communicating with it. It came back and hovered with wings outstretched before the moon, leaving as soon as the picture was shot.

During these years Rob used alcohol, marijuana and tobacco consistently, although never in conjunction with meditation. He used them to deaden himself from the rising energy, which he believes allowed him to be functional by depressing the central nervous system and helped him remain oriented to the material world and feel comfortable. He had insomnia and much restless energy at night, and a couple of puffs of marijuana helped him sleep. Later he recognized a dependency on these drugs and cut back on their use.

In 1980 Rob began conscious work with energy, after reading a book by Brugh Joy and attending a two-week intensive seminar with him to learn ways of heightening and using healing energy. While there he experienced a psychic opening, felt a unitive experience with the universe, and had a Shamanic experience where he could perceive entities and move clouds. At times he would feel physically and emotionally contracted, or experience mood swings, but when he could move away from his personality he would feel unified with nature and God. While drawing a tree he felt merged with it. He experienced kriyas, or involuntary jerking and spasms, concentrated mainly in the second and third chakra areas; if he induced the energy by feeling himself open to it and visualizing, it became unstoppable. He also experienced passing tremendous amounts of energy in healing.

Two weeks later Rob attended a workshop with Richard Moss, using energy exercises to alter consciousness for healing. His energy became even more intense and when he looked into the sky he felt he would disappear unless he held onto a tree. Grounding exercises he tried were useless. He was terrified at times, and felt he "was absolutely on fire". He would smoke and drink "to keep from exploding", and exercise, walk, and run.

Coming home he felt completely out of control. "I felt schizophrenic -- I saw the world in a new way -- and it was warped and uncontrollable and I was unable to be rational." He also wondered if he were manic-depressive, with "mood swings from euphoria to total contraction, expansion to suicidal, and thinking the energy would probably kill me anyhow". His wife tried to use energy-balancing techniques with her hands to balance his energy but he only became worse. She called Moss who told her not to give him any more energy but to have sex with him and to have him run. At times following this experience he would feel wide open, and meditate in front of the full moon, feel himself go into the moon and feel out of his body, then come back and use the hot tub, swimming, walking, sex, drugs and work to try to dull the energies.

He continued to work with both Joy and Moss, which always brought new levels of energy, and greater understanding of the process. In 1982, at another conference with Joy, Rob's work required him to hold energy for a group in his heart chakra, and do many psychic exercises. During a three-day break, in which he had fasted and kept silent, he was sitting by a pool listening with a walkman to some highly dissonant and disruptive music of Phillip Glass, which made him feel open, “as if losing touch with the time-space dimension". It was 120 degrees outside and he stepped into a very cold pool, on the first step. As he did he felt intense energy move upward from his feet. As he stepped down each step the sensation increased, moving upward to each chakra. Leaving one chakra "it would expand the chakra above it, building intensity like a crescendo, and I felt very open, with no resistance, like flowing into the wind". It was a "totally incredible and intense experience that I followed until my nose was in the water."

The following day, while at a restaurant, he felt some pressure in his chest and couldn't eat much. He felt agitated and became irritated at a colleague. That night when he went to sleep he awoke around 2 or 3 a.m. His stomach ached and he was extremely cold. He felt as if his food had impacted and left a burning sensation in his stomach. All the events and learning of the conference felt packed into the psoas muscle. He was semi-conscious, and only half aware. He felt freezing and put on several sets of clothes, a down jacket and five or six blankets. His energy would contract and constrict in cycles, intensifying until his whole being felt condensed to the size of a pea at the base of the spine and the physical agony was incredible and unbearable. The following is an excerpt from his journal:

> Suddenly energy exploded upward from the root chakra to the high third chakra under the heart, where it explodes like a neutron bomb going off in my chest. I expanded spherically in tiny pieces, which were all that remained of me, like bits of energy traveling fast like warp speed to the ends of the universe. I felt I was passing through and interacting (like holographic interference) in thought forms and sources of collective knowledge like the Akashic Records

> and Dead Sea Scrolls and said to himself 'Hey -- I know all that stuff.' I became waves of energy passing on and on past the edges of the universe. Nothing was left. Then very slowly the bits of energy began to fall back. As they came near me they got feathery and essence like, shimmering inward very softly, nurturing me and feeling exquisite. I hang suspended in this feathery stuff and wonder what its about. A voice answers very loudly, clearly and firmly 'This is a state of grace.' I'm loving it. Soon I feel a little form tugging at the edge of the feather ball --'Let me in, let me in -- you left me!' I know it is my ego -- I know if I do it will get control of me. But I know I must accept it and love it.

When Rob woke up from this experience he found he could neither move nor speak, he had no energy and was completely immobilized. He watched his roommate move around and tried to speak but couldn't. He wondered if he had disappeared. Finally he made a "humph" sound and the roommate came over and asked if something was wrong. When he was touched, Rob was able to mumble "Get the others -- I need help." Six of Joy's assistants came over and gave him hands-on energy treatment for 20 minutes and he could feel life slowly coming back into his body.

Since this time Rob has continued his usual practices of meditation and exercises, sold his business and become more involved in community service programs, especially working with people who are dying. He says he has increased compassion, is much more service oriented, and works constantly to manifest his spiritual awareness in his life. He has moments of pure bliss and samadhi in meditation and spontaneously, sometimes several times a week, sometimes not for a month or so. He has difficulty tolerating alcohol. Sometimes his energy arises and he gets flashes of awareness and the answers to problems.

While traveling in Europe he had an intense psychic experience in a church called the Knights Temple, where he felt and saw with great details scenes of being a knight templar in the first Crusades. He knew nothing of the stories of these knights, who were a small band that took pilgrims to the Holy Land, nor did he know at the time he was at the scene where the Holy Grail was supposedly kept. Another time, in Carcassone, France, the center of epic battles of the Crusades, he had a similar experience involving being on a battle field and killing hundreds of men with gray and blue hats. Later, in Egypt, he recognized the Muslim costumes associated with the images he had seen.

Rob had consistent lower back pain for many years that became worse until it ended six months before this interview. It focused in the area of the second chakra, and often he would lie in bed feeling his legs shaking and energy blocked in the lower back. He used yoga asanas and four kinds of bodywork to become more open: Hellerwork, which focused on his fascia and deep tissue; energy work as taught by Joy; Jin Shin Do which treated his organs and meridians; and Polarity which affects bone structure. He feels Hellerwork saved his life at one point, when there was so much pain he could not lie in bed more than a half hour at a time. In addition, there were internal components of self acceptance and letting go of control that had to occur to release the pain. He works with the pain in the body as holding psychological content, learning from it, being in it, and seeing what it is telling him.

Rob has had heart attack symptoms frequently, although mild enough that he does not think about them, saying they are just contractions of the heart chakra. Only once, when he was working in industry and under stress, did he feel it might be a real heart attack. Tests showed he had no heart problems. He has no other physical problems he would attribute to Kundalini, but after his last major opening the cartilage tore loose in his ribs, and he still has a floating rib. He said "I felt as if I had been run over by a locomotive".

He often sees lights when meditating, in varying colors at different time. When his state of being shifts he may see color flashes, as if there is a dark sky with pinholes through which luminescent blue and purple come through and grow a bit. At times he sees auras.

Rob advises others dealing with this energy to expand into it, rather than contract against it, and to breathe fully. He believes the problems people have with it are due to resistance. He has found it essential to keep his body loose in order to move the energy, and he consistently does yoga exercises plus nautilus work, running, and bodywork for this reason. When asked about the meaning of this experience for him he said "It is my life".

Commentary on Diagnosing This Experience:

Rob has had life-long experience with pranic energy which came into full awareness and focus after the lecture with Bernie Gunther. I have met other people who felt similarly in touch with this energy field since childhood and work as psychics and healers. Rob is similar to many new-age people who are willing to try many experiences and push themselves constantly in order to have a breakthrough in consciousness. He continued vigorous pursuit of energy experiences despite the difficulties they caused him, and worked nearly constantly on his personal process. He managed a successful career and marriage, and family life. Eventually he experienced the intense openings associated with Kundalini, and felt a powerful shift in the focus of his energies toward greater service in society. His description of the opening during the second seminar resonates with a number of those in the literature and a developmental pattern of this process seems clear in his story. His experiences with kriyas, back pain, insomnia, heart pains, past life memories and lights while meditating are all consistent with the literature, as is bliss, psychic capacities and his growing spiritual orientation.

Rob is an example of someone who has learned to work consistently with this energy, using it in a conscious process of psychological as well as spiritual growth. He also used a variety of bodywork modalities effectively to alleviate some of the difficulties, along with other forms of physical release. His process seems greatly enhanced by having spiritual teachers who not only assisted in the expansion of the energy but taught him methods that have helped him to integrate and understand it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NURTURING SPIRIT IN THE BODY

The case histories show us clearly that Kundalini awakening is an act of transformation, and a catalyst triggering change in every aspect of being -- physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. Whether the transformation is recognized as a mystical event or viewed as a biological process, one usually needs to face many physiological and psychological components. In order to integrate and tap into the inherent joy of living the experience can provide, one must learn to sustain and channel freely very high levels of energy. It is essential to come into acceptance and appreciation of the energetic process, to open to it, and to allow it to motivate new ways of being. The ego's task is primarily to remove barriers and develop a physical and psychic structure which is able to tolerate and integrate spirit. From a therapeutic perspective, there are five major tasks necessary for a successful integration to occur. They are described briefly as follows:

1. Understanding:

Understanding and education regarding the essential spiritual and transformative nature of this process, and the nature of the conflict between ego and Self. It is then possible to recognize the symptoms and endure them with a degree of witness-consciousness. Having friends who also understand greatly facilitates progress. The therapist must provide a loving and supportive container that is theoretically broad enough to hold this process.

2. Life-Style Adjustments:

Willingness to make essential life-style adjustments in order to reduce stress, live moderately, follow spiritual practices, and find one's personal rhythm through deeper contact with the inner being. Living closer to nature and bringing simple structures and supports into one's life can be nourishing and supportive, along with self-expressive creative activities, movement and dance.

3. Empowering The Body:

Strengthening the body and opening energy blocks through body therapies, massage and oil treatments, practices such as hatha yoga or chanting, pranayama or breathwork, dietary changes, and grounding activities.

4. Psychological Or Karmic Clean-Up:

Finishing up old psychological business. All the old karmic debts have come due and one must come to terms with unfinished desires, unexpressed emotions, and self-destructive habits before the spiritual life can come to full fruition. This can be assisted by writing, drawing, dancing, talking things through, crying it out and various kinds of therapy. Above all one must learn patience, faith, love, self-acceptance and to trust the natural flow of life. This is a stage of letting-go.

5. Owning The Inner Self:

Connecting with one's inner guidance through processes such as imagery, dialogue with various aspects of oneself, dreams, art, and meditation. Learning to witness external behaviors, and listen with the heart to inner voices.

This book addresses in its entirety the issue of education and understanding. The other tasks are considered in depth in this chapter on the body and the following chapter on psychological and emotional factors. The insight and advice gathered here is from spiritual teachers, therapists and individuals who have experienced awakening. None of these suggestions are proven nor experimentally validated. There exists no precise method of treatment for this transition, other than the ancient admonition to be under the guidance of an enlightened teacher. But there are many possibilities to explore.

Am I Insane? Or Dying?

The most distressing part of experiencing the many body symptoms of Kundalini is the anxiety that erupts around the thought "I must be crazy -- only crazy people hear voices and jerk around like this", or "I must have some terrible disease -- maybe two or three of them." Once the possibility of organic cause is eliminated, the most important step in overcoming such doubts is to understand that one is not alone in this condition, that it has been defined and described in over 4000 years of written history, and is experienced by many who follow the spiritual practices of mystics. Because higher levels of energy rush through the physical system, there are many disruptions of the normal biological and neurological processes, and random stimulation of the brain will produce spontaneous reactions, most of which pass without any treatment. On the other hand, if this experience is triggered by an accident, if there is any history of seizure disorder, or if the disruptions are uncontrollable and lead to long periods of trance and exhaustion, it is advisable to get the evaluation of a neurologist in order to rule out complex motor disorders.

If there are frequent physical manifestations, not attributable to any medical cause, there are several ways these might be interpreted. According to the principles underlying most body therapies, blocks in the physical body are related to areas of stress or holding due to a contraction that occurred during a past trauma. Bodies contract in response to pain, both physical and psychological, and we develop rigidity and tension through holding contractions, or by repeatedly responding in particular ways to unpleasant stimulus. When people breathe, bend or are manipulated in new patterns during therapy, release occurs, often along with shaking and vibrating movements. Such movements may also occur while doing breathwork or hatha yoga. Some of the kriyas and pains that accompany Kundalini awakening are also the result of energy pressing against contracted areas, pushing for release.

Some patterns of physical symptoms, such as those of Krishnamurti, when he felt his head was being opened every night, or Irina Tweedie, when overwhelmed by sexual energy, seem to be purposeful invasions of energy to perform a certain task on the body. Gopi Krishna emphasized that this task was to transform the body to meet the demand of evolution for another kind of human who would be a "genius", having direct access to the wisdom of cosmic consciousness. Aurobindo and others have discussed this as a cellular transformation of the body, creating a new kind of human being. Many people with Kundalini symptoms report a feeling of "being worked over" by an energy or a source they cannot describe.

Many patterns of energy release may be attributed to the stimulation of certain areas of the brain that are receiving higher charges of energy than normal, and sending messages along various neuronal pathways, which are received by the nervous system and translated into energy charges, jerks, vibrations, etc. In addition, eastern theory suggests that the subtle body system is activated and cleared during this process, and the invisible nadis which move energy throughout the subtle body system are being opened and purified by Kundalini energy. Breathing exercises, yoga asana, acupressure, and acupuncture are useful ways to open the flows within this complex system.

If the body is in pain, feels stiff, or is frequently subjected to strong vibrational patterns, body therapy may help because it opens the body, releasing traumas and memories, and enables breath to flow more freely and fully. Practices such as dance, massage, yoga, Tai Chi, movement therapy, acupressure, or breathwork can be supportive, and enable people to express higher levels of energy. It is best to learn them from teachers and therapists who understand spiritual processes. An attitude of exploration is useful, because not everyone will respond well to the same kinds of bodywork. Some people will feel nourished, relaxed or energized through treatments. Paradoxically, others may find their bodies too sensitized to handle any kind of touch, and discover it is best to forego such practices in order to tone down energetic phenomena. As energy intensifies in the body it is essential to find ways to express it rather than contract against it. Dance, song, running, movement, exercise, and creative activities are helpful.

Staying on the Ground

Following the deep transpersonal processes accessed through body therapies, altered-state imagery, hypnogogic states and similar processes it is helpful to do grounding practices, which bring one back fully into body-awareness and reality orientation. People who pursue mystical states are frequently accused of having their "heads in the clouds", a clear indication one needs to learn to ground more completely on the earth plane. A therapist can help by holding a client's feet while they concentrate on breathing in all the way down to the soles. Or it is useful to have the client walk, stomp, dance, or pretend to have the feet of a lion hugging the ground. Grounding can be as simple as taking time to have a cup of tea and discussing with someone how to integrate an experience into everyday life. It can be done with visualizations, such as pretending to be an oak tree, stretching one's branches (arms) into the sun and roots (energy flowing through the soles of the feet) into the ground. It can be done by hugging a tree, tending a garden, working with clay, kneading dough, baking, engaging in athletic activities, hiking and building sand castles (in the sand).

In order to live our lives in ways that bring forth our spiritual insights and align us with our depths, we must build a strong physical and psychological container that is comfortable being alive on this planet. Without this we may be subjected to disorientation, inflation, and terrible angst. It is clear from the lives of some of the Christian saints, as well as in the stories of psychotherapists who treat anorexia and other body-denying conditions, that those who spend years separating their spirit from their body are often subjected to extreme ill-health and even premature death. When we honor the tasks of day-to-day living, and care for the health of our bodies we begin to build a container in this world that can carry the impact of spiritual awareness into the human dimension. Impulses toward starvation and extreme asceticism undoubtedly emerge from the demonic or dark side of this experience, related not so much to transcendence as to hatred of the human condition. True enlightenment brings appreciation for human existence and compassion for its limitations.

The order, discipline and regularity of life in a spiritual community, such as an ashram or monastery, has a practical purpose of helping people with a tendency toward mystical or ethereal states of awareness to have tasks that reengage the body and mind in the simple realities of life. In addition, responsible spiritual communities promote a moderate and moral code of living and a life of service to others, which support the psyche in the Kundalini process. On the whole, people I have known who followed consistent structure such as work or family life seemed better able to integrate these energies than those who had little else to occupy their minds. Too much structure would be oppressive during the intensity of spiritual awakening, but moderate discipline and consistent work are immensely supportive.

If their lifestyle is not satisfying, those who are in the Kundalini process may feel internally pushed to make changes that better support their physical and emotional needs. Major changes occur, as people leave jobs, relationships and homes and move to the ocean or the woods, or travel to India, or to other environs to which they feel drawn. I have noticed such a totality in these kinds of decisions, as if an unseen force is sweeping one into one's destiny. In such cases it is helpful to have a strong spiritual teacher or guide, a commitment to using rationality in caring for one's physical being, and friends or a support system of people who understand what is happening.

The healthier the personality structure and the body before the awakening, the better one can deal with radical upheavals, and follow such callings successfully. Being grounded in one's own being (the capacity to feel centered and whole), and being grounded in a practical appreciation of reality, are great spiritual allies.

Living With Kriyas

It is clear that numerous varieties of kriyas often accompany this process, and that some of them appear to be related to growth and others to pleasure. These may include intense heat and energy streaming up the spine or radiating from the body, tremors, spasms or spastic movements, violent shaking, twisting movements, anal or uterine contractions, jaw clenching and emitting of vocal noises and animal sounds. The entire body can become either rigid or limp, and there may be intense pain, sensations of expansion or contraction, out-of-body experiences, twitches and a seemingly endless and imaginative range of other movements and responses.

Swami Sivananda wrote: "You may get jerks of the hands, legs, trunks and whole body. Sometimes the jerk is very terrible....It is nothing. It can do nothing....It is due to sudden muscular contraction from the new pranic influence, new nerve-stimuli. Remember that new nerve currents are formed now owning to the purification of nadis from sadhana. The jerks will pass off after some time." He commented that a tremor that may occur during meditation is due to prana being taken up to the brain, and is simply a stage in the process. He said "the sudden jerks in meditation come especially when the prana becomes slow and the outward vibrations make the mind come down from its union with the Lord to the level of physical consciousness".[1]

Kriyas probably occur as well when intense levels of energy impact various areas of the brain, which respond automatically to the stimulus in their characteristic ways. The emitting of sounds and tones may also be correlated with brain stimulation, or with the release of certain blockages in the chakras. To reduce kriyas one might reduce the energy stimulus temporarily by avoiding meditation and other practices that increase energy flow, and utilizing more active methods of expending energy such as exercise and creative self-expression. One needs to live in an expanded energy field, integrating the energy, accepting and responding with trust to the unknown and unpredictable. As physical and emotional contraction decrease, usually kriya activity is reduced.

Although kriyas are commonly thought to be responses to blocks in the body, or involuntary relaxation responses, I have observed them flowing intensely during altered states of consciousness and believe they may occur at times when one's awareness is in the subtle body rather than the gross body. It may be that an energy exchange is going on between the two and no awareness is there to hold the gross body in its accustomed rigid pattern. It is as if one has surrendered to the flow of an energy field and is being carried like a piece of bark on a river. These kinds of kriyas are often smooth and rhythmical, and may leave in their wake a sensation of blissful tingling in the body, along with an aroused and energized physical system.

Illness & Pseudo-Illness

Latent illness erupts, or a pseudo-illness sometimes arises during the Kundalini process, that cannot be adequately diagnosed by medical doctors. People complain of headaches and bands of energy tightening around the skull or burning the top of the head. A few men and women have what appears to be a false pregnancy, with the belly swollen (called "Buddha belly") periodically for a number of months. Some people have chest pains and numbness, symptoms very similar to those of a heart attack. This is likely due to the Kundalini energy moving through the anahata, or heart chakra. It may be that the nervous system, the digestive tract or the hormonal system is seriously disrupted.

B.S. Goel also noted among his problems such symptoms as automatic twitching and concentration between the eyebrows, a burning and pulling sensation in his eyes as if they were being tugged at by magnets, an increased pulse-rate, his tongue coated white with thick saliva, difficulties in passing urine, and seeing a red aura spread throughout the brain when he closed his eyes and tried to concentrate. But he said that to him the most important indication of Kundalini was that after each state of severe suffering, he automatically shifted to a state of peace, bliss and stability.

The lives of many mystics include periods when they were subject to peculiar illness. Evelyn Underhill pointed out in Mysticism that, even though they had robust intelligence and intellectual ability, such saints as Plotinus, St. Bernard, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. John of the Cross, and the Sufi poets Jame and Jalalu'ddin, suffered poor physical health. She added that "More, their mystical activities have generally reacted upon their bodies in a definite and special way producing in several cases a peculiar kind of illness and of physical disability, accompanied by pains and functional disturbances for which no organic cause could be discovered, unless that cause were the immense strain which exalted spirit puts on the body adopted to a very different form of life."[2]

Swami Narayanananda related specific physical illness to what he termed partially awakened Kundalini moving by improper paths. He said the awakened shakti often absorbs excess heat and cold in the body, along with poisons and pains from various body parts, and that when the Kundalini-shakti absorbs cold, its activities become very dull, and its movements very painful and unpleasant. He attributes this slow movement of energy through various chakra areas as the cause of problems such as "looseness" and "lack of control" of the genitals, liver malfunctions, stomach pain and disorders, heart troubles and heaviness of the chest, breathing troubles and asthma, heaviness of the head with a "dull brain", and colds.

On the other hand, he believed when Kundalini absorbs heat and carries hot currents to different body parts one may have "lascivious desires", genital irritation, "continuous secretion of semen, until he is exhausted and weak", and experience conditions such as nervous debility, wet dreams, piles, jaundice, cough, dyspepsia, loss of memory, loss of vigor, fear, hatred, and premature aging. He reported that such hot currents can injure nerves and veins of the anus and cause improper blood circulation, or influence the bladder, causing constipation and intense burning. In addition they may cause heart palpitations and burning sensations in the heart, lungs, spleen and stomach. He said that during exposure to wind and cold weather the currents have difficulty penetrating above the heart center and may travel instead toward the left hand, which will become numb for awhile.

If over-heated currents reach the mind, he said, one suffers sleeplessness, headaches, loss of vitality, peevishness and possible "brain derangement or insanity." His recommendation for these mental diseases was to use a wet loin cloth, or to keep the region of the anus and genitals under a cold water bandage for 24 hours, changing it every 15 or 20 minutes. (Perhaps this is the equivalent of the western "cold shower"!) In his opinion, in the loins this shakti can cause lumbago, and in the abdomen, colic. If it remains in the stomach one can get chronic dysentery. When treatment is given to one body part, the problem may move to another, and medicines provide only a temporary cure. He said stomach complaints are usually the first problems of spiritual aspirants, and medicines tend to make the cure more complicated.[3]

If Narayanananda's evaluation of these problems is correct, it is reasonable for individuals with Kundalini difficulties to be especially careful about the balance of heat and cold in their bodies, and avoid extremes of temperature in food and environment. He stated that these diseases could be easily cured by purifying the Kundalini-shakti, keeping it always in a normal state of working through regular pranayama practice in the morning and evening, and by adjusting food, drink, bath, weather, etc. to proper temperatures.

The pranayama he recommended is a form of alternate-nostril breathing, where the throat is locked and the inhaled breath held between the heart and throat until it is released. One breathes through the right nostril for five minutes, and then through the left nostril, until gradually confidence and endurance enables one to breathe up to 30 minutes through each nostril. (He warns never to do this pranayama during pregnancy.)

It is useful to know a variety of pranayama exercises and yogic asanas, which are taught at most yoga centers, because some of them specifically modulate body temperature, or affect particular body organs. These practices should not be followed compulsively or obsessively once Kundalini is awakened but individuals should experiment to discover the practices that have beneficial effect on their own well-being and use them to strengthen and moderate the pranic energies. In similar ways acupressure and acupuncture treatments can balance the system and alleviate many symptoms.

According to Swami Sivananda there are other remedies for some of the Kundalini symptoms. He wrote of both positive and negative sensations, commenting that in meditation "You will feel that power is radiating from you. Your consciousness will be deeper. Thoughts of God will start the spiritual currents in the body. If heat is produced in the head, apply butter, or a malak or Brahmi oil. Take cold baths. Take butter and sugar-candy."[4]

It is not uncommon for some ashrams to provide chocolate as a counter-effect following intense meditation programs, and some meditators report that the purpose is to replace lecithin in the body, which tends to diminish during prolonged states of altered consciousness. The use of oil massage has also been recommended for the relaxation of involuntary spasms by Baba Hari Dass.[5] When Irina Tweedie complained to her guru about the ice-cold feeling on the top of her head when she did a head stand, her guru recommended hot tea with a bit of butter in it "to prevent dryness of the brain."[6] One subject commented that frequent baths, tranquillity tanks, ginger soaks or mud baths were very soothing and helpful.

Sivananda explained discomforts that may come during meditation such as numbness, jerks, and ticklishness, as the body's effort to hold on to new vibrations. When the hands are numb he advised that one massage each arm with the palm, without moving or opening the eyes. He stated that in order to become a perfect yogi and experience the "wonderful samadhi" one must control mind and breath, and continuously practice yoga. To achieve realization quickly he advised advanced aspirants to stop all work, to remain in a solitary place on the river, and to live on milk and fruit. They should plunge fully into their practice of meditation, sleep only two or three hours a day, and begin this practice at the beginning of winter in November. He wrote that it is the act of complete surrender that will bring grace to the yogi, which removes all obstacles, snares and pitfalls in the spiritual path.[7]

Most Westerners are not going to become "perfect yogis", live by a river and exist on only milk and fruit, and even if they did it is not likely to resolve all their difficulties. But it is interesting that people sometimes feel pulled by their inner psyches to do these types of yogic practices as Kundalini awakens. Many report much less need for sleep. Most of my subjects spontaneously became vegetarian. Sivananda's advice may seem contradictory to the comments of other teachers regarding balance, and the need for order and discipline. The difference here is perhaps one related to the goal, and to the fact that his words are aimed at "advanced" yogis, who have already traversed much of the path, and probably follow rigid rules of order and self-control. There are times when a spiritual aspirant wants only to go deeper, to put all of heart and soul into this inward process, pushing beyond all previous limits. This seems to be the direction of Sivananda's advice in this passage. It is most helpful to have a protected environment and a guide if one is to pursue this path, and most disturbing to do it alone, with no spiritual guidance.

Sleepiness & Trance

In contrast to reports that yogis often need very little sleep, Swami Muktananda ascribed symptoms of sleepiness, heaviness and lassitude to Kundalini, saying that some will fall into a deep sleep, but that this is a positive sign which passes and should not be alarming. This symptom was also commonly reported by the western subjects, along with lethargy and falling into trance.

Jung described some of the physical symptoms of Kundalini, including sleepiness, as conditions observed in many who moved into transformative stages of development. He said that when these disturbances arose, it was as if either the structure of the brain were changing or certain cells in it were destroyed. (The restructuring of the cells is commonly defined in yoga as a correlate of the Kundalini process; however stimulation of certain areas of the brain can also cause lethargy and trance.) Jung said that he knew from experience that regressive libido resembled a drug, working like a poison or toxin. He wrote "People whose libido is regressive feel terribly sleepy, they can hardly open their eyes and they feel generally unwell; the whole functioning of the body is upset....Very little is known about these things, but we know positively that in regressive moods, the viscosity of the blood is measurably decreased, and of course, the alteration in the blood affects the whole body."[8] He reported that latent diseases may be released by this condition, such as lingering infections, since the resistance of the body is reduced, and suggested this may account for the frequency of angina under certain psychological conditions.

These remarks may explain the characteristic sleep disturbances and sudden illness of people going through Kundalini awakening, which is invariably accompanied by the regression of libido. The yogis might attribute these conditions to increased shakti but there is no doubt that the deeply altered states of consciousness plunge one into a profoundly regressive state, in the sense that one is deeply removed from ordinary consciousness.

More Dynamic States

Muktananda also described a more dynamic view of the physical sensations of Kundalini, saying that in a seeker who is steadfast and full of devotion to his guru, Kundalini may pulsate with its grand, joyous and ecstatic vibrations in extraordinary ways. At these time the seeker may spontaneously dance, sing and weep. One may even shout, groan, roar like a lion, make animal sounds, chant Om loudly or say mantras spontaneously. Parts of the body may begin to move, and he/she may hop like a frog, spin, twist, run in circles, roll on the ground, slap the face, roll the head around and around, adopt yogic postures and mudras, shake, sweat, do yogic locks, pull the tongue in or up against the palate in the kechari mudra, or roll the eyeballs upward. Different kinds of pranayama may happen automatically. There is involuntary kumbhaka, or retention of the breath.

Like most gurus, Muktananda's prescription for treatment of Kundalini symptoms was primarily discipline, meditation, the avoidance of fear, and surrender to the guru, a classical yogic viewpoint. The guru is to be the container, in a way similar to that of a therapist when someone is in a deep psychic process---he/she is the hope, trust, and strength throughout the crisis. He advised students to avoid anger, resentment, and comparisons with others, and to control bad habits. He also suggested living in the company of Siddhas (Masters), avoiding aimless talk and false gossip, refusing to indulge in self-willed behavior, avoiding leftover food, and not touching people unnecessarily. He warned that too much talking and the company of useless people destroys the storehouse of shakti. The challenge for people enmeshed in western civilization is obvious here.

The interrelationship between mind and body underlies much of the advise in yogic literature regarding Kundalini processes. This makes yogic literature appear somewhat vague from the perspective of western medical treatment, which tends to isolate and treat symptoms of disease rather than exploring the hologram of a lifestyle as it relates to illness and health. Behavior, self-control, attitudes, emotions, and relationships are the significant factors emphasized when Kundalini presents difficulties.

This is a common understanding of eastern medicine, which treats patients in a holistic style, questioning what it is in their lives that contributes to physical illness, disease and good health. From this perspective one who has physical difficulties with this energy has not been adequately prepared psychologically or emotionally, and may also lack the strength and clarity that comes from following yogic cleansing practices, breathing exercises, correct living and asanas.

Themes of preparedness, moderate living, self-control, trust in the process, avoiding unnecessary stress, avoiding unhealthy company and developing a relationship with a guru, whether it be external or internal, echo throughout the literature. There is little about dealing with symptoms in such a way as to make them disappear. Ultimately, the intention is that through the inner work and attitude and the grace of a guru or higher source one will experience bliss and profound wisdom, so there is little rationale for making the energy stop.

In the West, some yoga teachers advise those made uncomfortable by this process to shorten meditation and eliminate pranayama exercises for awhile; to eliminate meat (or begin eating it again); to give up alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine and other addictive substances; to eat natural and alive foods (vegetables, greens, fresh fruit); to practice hatha postures; and to simplify their lifestyle. These are all ways of experimenting with slowing down or inhibiting the intensity of the energy, or enhancing the body's ability to sustain higher energies. The Ayurvedic medicine of India is concerned with balancing and harmonizing pranas in the body, so herbal remedies as prescribed by an Ayurvedic practitioner may also be helpful.

When all else fails try talking to the energy. One subject I interviewed asked it to leave her alone when she was driving or out in public, and thereafter had no more "spacing-out" symptoms in either situation. This suggests the value of a "relationship" with this "otherness". Dialogue is known by many therapists to be a way of aligning ourselves with deeper psychic structures, winning the cooperation between our many aspects of self.

Sarah, who practices voice-dialogue with clients experiencing Kundalini, frequently has the energy speak through the client as if the goddess was a sub-personality. This enables the client to own and integrate some of the aspects of the deeper Self, and reflect more deeply on the reasons for any difficulties the energy has generated in the system. (Another option is to dialogue with a troublesome symptom or body part and ask it why it is creating pain or difficulties.) Creative processes such as art, clay modeling, dance, and movement can also help clients to get in touch with physical or emotional blocks and move into them and through them. Richard Moss wrote in The Black Butterfly (1986), about singing out his emotional states, and making up songs and movements to express them, as a method of transcending them.

It is clear that the physical aspects of this process cannot be addressed separately from the psychological aspects, which may in fact be true at the deepest level for any disease or ailment. On the other hand if latent problems do emerge, appropriate medical diagnosis should be sought. Mystics are as prone to life-threatening illness as any other segment of the population and it would be foolhardy to attribute every symptom to the Kundalini. There are specific kinds of illness that carry Kundalini-like symptoms, as well as vulnerable body systems that become ill as a consequence of the heightened energy in the body, and appropriate tests are often needed. But if medical examination is inconclusive; and symptoms appear to be floating or short-lived rather than consistent, those who are engaged in this process need to release fear and anxiety and may wish to address the emotional blocks that might be constricting the free flow of spiritual energy.

To Eat or Not to Eat

Yogic texts emphasize the importance of proper diet, generally recommending moderate eating, and vegetarian fare. Fasting is not generally advocated. However Gopi Krishna described erratic swings in appetite during periods of his Kundalini difficulties, ranging from eating four to six times the amount of food he would have eaten at a sitting before the Kundalini awakening, to desiring no food at all for days. He said lack of appetite was a common occurrence. If he disregarded his scheduled time to eat, he lost all appetite and taste, sometimes becoming nauseous.

In one instance, after weeks of not eating because of a strong aversion to food, Krishna tried to swallow a few morsels and wash them down with water. He felt a sudden unbearable stab of pain in the abdomen and around the sacral plexus, so intense that he fell prostrate, writhing and twisting on the floor. The pain left after a few hours. A few days later, while his son was eating rice in front of him, his appetite returned.

He decided that the intervals between attempting to eat were too long, and he would try to eat small amounts every three hours. He found he could hold this amount of food down, but he continued to have convulsions, pain sensations along nerve paths and delirium. He believed he was going to die. At the height of this crisis he fell asleep for the first time in weeks and dreamed a vivid dream in which he saw himself seated with a meal in front of him consisting of a half-filled plate of boiled rice and meat, which he ate with enjoyment. When he awoke he asked his wife to prepare this dish and serve it to him every two hours, and by nightfall he felt a slight relief and was able to sleep through the next night. The next day he ate every hour, then moved to an hour a half, but added fruit and curd to the diet. Gradually the delirium vanished and insomnia gave way to an excessive desire to sleep. He began eating four to six times the quantity of food he had eaten earlier in his life, and to select the constituents of every meal, choosing a combination of acids and alkalis, sugars and salts, fruits and vegetables, in a manner that helped him to digest enormous quantities.

Not long after this dietary shift Krishna's condition stabilized and he was able to return to work and other responsibilities of life. He attributes his many dietary problems to "a poisoned state of nerves, an inevitable result of the awakening in the first stages, for which there is no known antidote except proper feeding in spite of the aversions, done in a manner as may be indicated by the habits and the condition of the system."[9]

He advised that high quality, easily digestible, completely natural foods should be taken in small amounts at regular intervals, at least every three hours. He believed a nutritious diet was essential in order to enable the nervous system to rid itself of impurities. Krishna wrote that aversion to food is a common feature in sudden awakening, and that the abrupt release of this force and its movement through the nerves causes acute disturbances in the digestive and excretory systems. Some hatha yoga exercises teach aspirants to empty the stomach and colon at will to prepare for emergencies that may accompany this experience.

Narayanananda strongly advised one to avoid foods and drinks that are too hot or too cold, as they will impact the movement of Kundalini with the problems he attributed to the shakti's tendency to absorb heat or cold and cause various physical illness. An exception is if hot or cold drinks are needed to balance extreme weather temperatures. He recommended a similar approach to bathing, using hot water in cold weather, and cold water in hot weather, and moderate temperature otherwise. He also believed a body needed to be "in between leanness and fattiness" if Kundalini is to function normally and rise to higher centers, and he recommended a moderate diet with avoidance of alcohol. Fruits and vegetables should be selected according to their availability by season.[10]

In my experience a strictly vegetarian diet tends to make the body feel more light and less earth-bound and is therefore advantageous for people who tend to be too mental and pragmatic, and have difficulties going into meditative states. For this reason, and also because of values which oppose the killing of animals or concern about the effect of chemicals injected in animals before they are slaughtered, many spiritual aspirants never eat meat. I have heard from followers that their teachers recommend meat occasionally for people with distracting Kundalini symptoms in order to ground them, or help them become more body-conscious. Several subjects I interviewed reported that returning meat to the diet reduced uncomfortable symptoms. In other cases the sensitivity to the killing of animals is so acute that one feels ill or depressed after eating meat. Some noticed that eating regular meals made them feel better, sometimes eating as frequently as every three hours. Several subjects went through periods of extreme loss of appetite.

Most subjects who were not already vegetarian felt an inner compulsion to follow a vegetarian or semi-vegetarian diet after the awakening of Kundalini, especially finding no appetite for red meat. It is as if the body wants to maintain lightness and openness, and feels more comfortable without meat in the system. Elimination of drugs and alcohol also often occurred spontaneously, in some cases with people compulsively taking these items and throwing them out of the house.

Physician Gabriel Cousens, who describes his own Kundalini awakening, and outlines a nutritional program for the maintenance of spiritual energy in Spiritual Nutrition and the Rainbow Diet (1986), makes a case for the harmony of a vegetarian diet to support subtle body energetics. He describes a natural harmony between plants and human, since plants take in carbon dioxide, a product of human respiration, and convert it to oxygen and carbohydrates. He writes that "Each colored plant, as food, is a condensed spectrum band of sunlight color for us to take in for the balancing of our chakras and the physical organ, gland and nervous systems. When we take in a full spectrum throughout the day, we benefit by having our total chakra system balanced energetically by our plant friends. This is the principle of the Rainbow diet".[11]

He states that the correct alkaline/acid balance is 80% alkaline-forming foods (vegetables and fruits which are high in calcium, magnesium, potassium, sodium, and iron) and 20% acid-forming foods (proteins). He recommends fasting, food-combining (a method of eating foods together which digest well together), and under-eating. (He cites studies which suggest this may prolong the life-span.) Cousens states that the awakening of Kundalini energy seems to increase the need for glucose, which can be met by including complex natural carbohydrates in the diet. If the energy is too active, he reports the glucose from honey can calm it down, acting as a "pranic shock absorber".

Cousens' book includes many ideas for balancing and harmonizing the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of the being through correct diet, drawing from Ayurvedic medicine, Chinese concepts of yin and yang, macrobiotics and his background as a physician.

Visual Problems

The reports of several subjects and biographical accounts record difficulties with vision, apparently related to Kundalini. They describe their eyes closing spontaneously and refusing to open, and even temporary blindness. Great sensitivity to light is common, and sometimes there is pain in the eyes. Usually these symptoms pass within hours.

Muktananda described a time when he felt that the pupils of both his eyes became centered together, and he began to see one thing with two eyes. In the scriptures this is called *bindu bheda*. After this happened, a blue light opened in his eyes. He wrote that when this process starts, some aspirants feel they are losing their sight. In his case his eyes rolled around and up and down violently. Others could see it happening and were frightened. As the eyes revolved, the optical chakras were pierced, and he felt pain in both eyes and ears. He says that ultimately this condition leads one to clairvoyance.

I have not seen anything in the literature to indicate treatment to alleviate these specific difficulties, but in various yoga asana classes I have experienced a number of yogic exercises for the eyes, including rolling the eyes in a circle; rapid eye-movement in four directions and up and down, rubbing the hands together to generate heat and energy and then cupping them over the eyes, and staring at the moon or at distance objects until the eyes tear (which is said to develop psychic abilities). There are also acupressure points around the eyes, and an acupressure treatment of the facial muscles is very relaxing.

General Guidelines

With so many requirements for the proper nurturing and control to facilitate positive Kundalini experience, it is not surprising that modern Westerners, with their varieties of biases, sensate pleasures, material attachments, and undisciplined life styles, would have difficulty managing this energy effectively. It is clear that the firm structure of the ashram or spiritual community is designed to facilitate smooth passage through spiritual processes, and is the antithesis of secular society, although even in ashrams many difficulties may be experienced. Most of us would resent the curtailment of our freedom to eat and drink what we wish, enjoy sexuality, follow our inclinations, and cling to our mind-set about the meaning of life, even when such promises as spiritual enlightenment beckon. It is painful when the physical aspects of Kundalini force us to confront the reordering of our lives. Some wish only to find a way to cut off the process, which may be possible by plunging wholeheartedly into secular living, but this is likely to make them feel cut off from their deeper roots.

Probably most people who are not practicing yogis or part of another spiritual tradition, try to create a compromise between honoring the spiritual impulse and living the worldly temptations, seeking slowly a transition that will satisfy the inclinations of the deeper Self. It appears from the literature and reports of subjects that physical symptoms eventually pass, as long as one is willing to endure, and to bring balance and new energy into his/her life. Generally the advice is to practice yoga, live with self-discipline, eat moderately and avoid stimulants and meat, avoid indulgence in negative habits and relationships, avoid excessive stimulation and keep the mind tranquil.

In addition one might explore bodywork and self-expression to open blocks in the system or relax tensions. Allowing ample time for the energy to flow has been useful for some subjects, rather than trying to control or block it. This can be done by resting or meditating for a given period each day. Creating a relationship with it, that is talking to it as an ally or companion, and relaxing into it, can bring one into bliss. Many of us are not accustomed to high energy charge in our bodies and tighten against it or react as if it were painful. When we can align to it and expand our consciousness to include it we can find it is a source of pleasure. We might compare it to being contracted against an orgasmic experience, versus flowing with it. The same experience can be felt as painful or pleasurable. Once trust is built, the energetic phenomena are rarely painful. The pain is often caused by contraction, or occurs when energy is trying to move through injuries or severe blockage in the body.

It appears from the case histories that during difficult phases of the Kundalini process people should not be alone. Krishnamurti insisted two friends sit with him during these times, even though they did not interact or interfere, nor even understand the process. They did prevent him from hurting himself occasionally when he felt compelled to run, or would stand up and fall over due to the intensity of his pain. Krishna, Kennett and Goel all stressed the value of having persons who stayed with them through the process. Muktananda, Tweedie, and

Radha depended on the support of their gurus. I believe one of the most important things a therapist or friend can do is to provide a supportive environment, and act as a silent non-judgmental observer or a good listener. During any crisis those who have such friends or partners in their lives are immensely reassured by them.

When one has an illness which seems to be related to Kundalini it is, of course, important to receive medical evaluation. But when a diagnosis cannot be determined, it may be best to delay treatment for a reasonable period of time. Medications and exploratory surgery can only aggravate the difficulties for a Kundalini client. Sometimes a latent illness is generated by Kundalini and must be treated medically. Sometimes symptoms for which causes cannot be determined pass spontaneously through the system. This is why it is so important for physicians to have a rudimentary knowledge of this process.

Energy discharges and other conditions such as heat and cold rushes, or eating disorders, tend to come periodically, and to pass spontaneously. Some spiritual teachers such as Ramakrishna, Krishna, Krishnamurti, Muktananda, Kennett Roshi and Tweedie experienced extreme difficulty for a period of time, and many Westerners report the same. Others have only minimal discomfort. We can only speculate about the factors underlying these diversities. They may be related to the speed or depth at which the awakening is unfolding, the length of a yogic or other spiritual practice, the ability of the brain to respond to energetic changes, intensity of commitment to the process, maturity or stability in one's lifestyle, personality type, previous psychological and physical conditions, previous therapy or bodywork, the intervention of a guru who is facilitating the process, the kinds of karma to be relieved, the number of past lives in which one has had Kundalini experiences, and other factors beyond our comprehension. It would be interesting to compare the experiences of people who had practiced yoga asanas and pranayama for 20 years with an equal number of cases who had not practiced yoga.

I believe it is not accidental when an opening occurs, but that awakening is orchestrated by the deepest core of the inner Self. However, it seems likely that those in initial stages of this process may not have the same experiences as people in later stages, and that those who have serious psychological problems may be overwhelmed by this eruption. This energy pushes one toward completion through physical and emotional transformation, and no one claims the ability to predict its timing or its outcome for any individual. It is an encounter with the numinous, and the personality's ability to recognize and integrate such an encounter has a great impact on further development of the psyche.

Breath: The Great Generator

Understanding the relationship between breath and Kundalini is important for several reasons. First, many people who seem to have difficulties with Kundalini have practiced pranayama techniques, and most books which discuss pranayama say it can be a dangerous practice if done over-zealously, or without proper preparation and guidance. Because these practices are so readily available in books and classes today it is possible to do them without this preparation and to experience problems as a result. Over-zealous breathing practices have been blamed for many difficulties including perspiration, trembling, black-outs, hallucinations, blood-shot eyes, excessive heat in the body and bleeding gums.

Secondly, there are significant similarities between these yogic practices and modern breathwork therapies, where breathing patterns are altered and used to bring one to altered states of consciousness. This may be experienced in hypnotic states as well as with bodywork therapies and breathwork. Again, knowing that a client follows such practices can enable a physician or therapist to more accurately diagnose a Kundalini experience.

Finally, I have wondered whether breath practices may be useful to someone who has already awakened Kundalini as a method of gaining some control. Lee Sannella advises against this, seeing pranayama as a risky practice. In an interview with Baba Hari Dass, I was advised that people require differing breathing practices according to their temperament and where they are in their development. This is one reason the direction of a yogic master is so often recommended. Swami Narayanananda cites pranayama as essential to controlling physical problems related to the movement of energy in the body

In the yogic tradition pranayama is learned in sequential steps, appropriate to various stages of practice. There are six purification exercises done with the breath, which are usually practices learned before pranayama techniques, in order to cleanse the nadis or arteries of impurities. A series of contractions of the throat, abdomen and anal sphincter muscle, called *bandhas* or yogic locks, are often performed prior to, or concurrent with, pranayama, to hold the breath in the body.

The ultimate purpose of pranayama is the harmonization and control of the various energies of the body, leading to the awakening of Kundalini energy; with proper management of the energy as it releases upward through the spine. The practices of kriya yoga aim at releasing this energy by contracting the anal sphincter and following the movement of the breath upward from the base to the crown chakra. It seems that yogis who practice these techniques may experience Kundalini during meditation and achieve greater self-awareness, peacefulness, bliss and samadhi without having the uncontrolled disruptive experiences of the uninitiated.

According to Pancham Singh, translator of the Hatha Yoga Pradipika "Pranayama is nothing but a properly regulated form of the otherwise irregular and hurried flow of air, without using much force or undue restraint; and if this is accomplished by patiently keeping the flow slow and steady, there can be no danger." He indicates that it is impatience for yogic power that causes "undue pressure on the organs and thereby causes pains in the ears, the eyes, the chest. etc. If the three bandhas (the yogic locks) be carefully performed while practicing the pranayama, there is no possibility of any danger." [12]

Swami Vishnudevananda wrote that pranayama is one of the most important practices in all forms of yoga. Through pranayama one is able to control the nervous system and obtain gradual control over prana or the vital energy of the mind. "We constantly drain our life force or pranic energy by our thinking, willing, acting, etc......Yogis count life not by the number of years but by the number of breaths."[13]

Prana is carried to all parts of the nervous system through pranayama, taken in through inhalation and stored in nerve centers, especially in the solar plexus. This increases the yogi's vitality. Yogis declare that the correct habit of breathing, and following a natural diet, would regenerate the race and eliminate modern diseases of civilized man, such as high and low blood pressure, heart disease, asthma, and tuberculosis. These practices also increase will power, self-control, concentration, moral character and spiritual evolution.

According to the ancient Gheranda Samhita, factors that influence the effectiveness of pranayama practice include performing it in a proper place, establishing a consistent and correct time, eating moderately and purifying the nadis. It warns that if yoga is commenced in the hot, cold or rainy seasons one will contact diseases, and recommends beginning in spring or autumn. A yogi who does pranayama is advised to eat rice, barley or wheaten bread, and beans that are white, clean and free from chaff. Also allowable are patola (a kind of cucumber), and a number of other vegetables. "Pure, sweet and cooling food should be eaten to fill half the stomach: eating thus sweet juices with pleasure, and leaving the other half of the stomach empty is called moderation in diet." One should avoid bitter, acid, salt, pungent and roasted things, curd, whey, heavy vegetables, wine, palmnuts, and over-ripe jack-fruit, certain beans, stems, gourds, berries, onions, lotus and other items common to the Indian culture. Food that is hard (not easily digestible), putrid, very hot, or very stale, very cooling or very exciting should not be taken. [14]

It also recommends that the yogi avoid much traveling, the company of women, warming by the fire, early morning baths (before sunrise), fasting, and anything giving pain to the body.

There are a number of advanced pranayama techniques, which are generally not described in books but are passed down by teachers. These involve various kinds of breathing such as panting, rapid exhalations, breath retention, holding of the locks while focusing on the sixth chakra, turning the head slowly in each direction, holding the breath and rotating the stomach, and following the breath upward along the spine as in kriya practices. Deep meditation sometimes releases the spontaneous practices of pranayama, even in one who has not learned the techniques, and I have also seen them occur in breathwork, once a person moves beyond conscious control of the breathing.

Breathing practices are also significant in the Zen Buddhist tradition. In a description of how to practice Zen breathing by Kennett Roshi, Shakyamuni Buddha is described as having been successful in achieving enlightenment within hours of practicing the correct method of breathing, which is naturally known to children. This method involves following the natural flow of the breath, but at the beginning of meditation or if awareness is lost during meditation, returning to the following elliptic pattern:

> Inhalation starts at the base of the spine and continues up the spine to the crown of the head; exhalation starts at the crown of the head and continues down the front of the body to the pubic area where inhalation takes over at the base of the pine. Thus the breath goes in a circle, inhalation up the back of the body and exhalation down the front, and this irregular breathing is the turning of the Wheel of the Law.[15]

One is advised to follow the breath consciously two or three times and then to leave it behind and let the breath settle naturally into the rhythm that is right for the individual. This is a gentle breathing process, much less invasive than pranayama or breathwork, perfectly safe and useful for centering and concentrating energy. In my opinion more intense breathing exercises are also useful for centering and managing the inner energy, but they should be used with caution by one who has inadvertently opened the Kundalini. In my own experience I can do gentle pranayama and kriya exercises for a short while, but if I practice more than 15 minutes my energy becomes very intense, there may be pain in the spine, and I feel "strung out", or I become very cold. Using nutmeg on food is an Ayurvedic remedy to keep the body warmer. Other factors, such as physical injuries, or emotional trauma, seem to make these energy flows uncomfortable for some people.

It is possible to trigger emotional difficulties and Kundalini crisis through intense practice of pranayama when one is not "purified" in mind, body or emotional discipline to handle the high intensity of energy it can generate. I would not recommend this technique for those who tend toward compulsive and over-zealous practice, unless they live in an ashram setting with a qualified spiritual teacher.

It is helpful for individuals dealing with Kundalini to understand pranayama techniques and the dietary advice that supports them because these may sustain a physical system that can best support Kundalini. These techniques develop mastery and control of inner processes. Breathing through the left nostril is said to cool the body system, and breathing through the right nostril is said to heat it. The right nostril is also said to raise emotions, and the left to calm them down. The breath, properly directed, has the power to clean and open the physical system, free it from physical and emotional disturbances, relieve radical internal or external temperature change, and stimulate equanimity and inner peace. The ultimate goal is to have control over the mind, which makes liberation possible. There are many specific advanced pranayamas developed to modulate temperature, moods, organic difficulties, and mental distractions.

It is obvious that breathwork produces psychic responses and other changes traditionally attributed to pranayama. One may experience a wide range of physical releases, images, emotional catharsis and spiritual openings. Pranayama seems to prepare the yogi in much the same way, but without the drama, for one is taught to sit and simply observe whatever comes up. In breathwork, the tendency is toward expression and cathartic release. In both processes it is staying with something -- going completely through an awareness or experience without getting attached to it, neither trying to enhance it nor to avoid it, which seems to produce release and transformation of the personality.

In yoga practice, Zen meditation, or a breathwork session one knows the time-frame and the intention of the practice, and this holds them in a container which allows them to deal effectively with fear or difficulty, especially if a teacher is working with them. One who is isolated in this experience, or surrounded by people who think it is abnormal, suffers greatly from the lack of context and boundary. Therapists can help such individuals to create both.

Body Therapies & Kundalini

In the West the practice of using bodywork along with concentration on the breath is becoming more common, and responses to various kinds of bodywork may range from discomfort to emotional catharsis to activating new energies, lights and visions.

Anma Massage and Acupressure

Kennett Roshi wrote that one who meditates can have difficulty tolerating invasive forms of body therapy, and she recommended a gentle bodywork called Anma massage, which can be self-administered, or the use of acupressure, to assist with the subtle tensions related to meditation.

Kennett stated that Jin Shin Do (a form of acupressure), regardless of the attitude of mind of the one who is doing it, may have a slightly coarse and manipulative feeling about it to the meditator, as if the "energy flows" are sometimes temporarily channeled backward through the meridians or are run back and forth to scour out the blocks. "Of course," she adds, "there are times when this is precisely what is needed: I have personally seen great good accomplished through the use of these releases. Some of them seem particularly suited to assisting a person in recalling memories of early traumatic experiences and even karmic memory traces of unresolved problems from previous lives. As such, I believe they could be of considerable use in psychotherapy." 16

My personal experience and research, suggests that Jin ShinDo assists greatly to open nadis or energy channels in the body, balance energy, strengthen body organs, and encourage transcendent experiences.

Anma massage is a subtle and gentle mudra system used at Shasta Abbey, but Kennett warned that unless it is practiced with the mind of meditation, and faith in something greater than oneself, it is useless. She saw the practice as a sacramental act tapping into energy much greater than that contained in the meridians, and called this energy the "Love of the Lord", beyond any limits of physical anatomy. Thus the points used in Anma massage are not restricted to the areas of the traditional meridian systems, and do not require the practitioners to have their hands directly on the body. However she saw direct touching necessary at times because "it is sometimes important to know that one is loved by man as well as by the Cosmic Buddha, and there is no more effective way of knowing this than to feel the warm touch of a loving hand on your body." She also stated that in this system: "Finally, it is not even necessary to use mudras at all; the energy can be directed and tensions in the meridians can be cleansed solely through the power of meditation or contemplative prayer."[17]

Side effects of Anma treatments can include the arousal of sexual energy, or a greatly increased sensitivity and vulnerability, so that one becomes so aware of the condition of all things and so emphatically linked to them that pain is felt when a flower is picked or strain is placed on a spring. If one is being treated for a serious illness it may appear that all the vital energy has retreated within, so that he/she appears to be weaker or deteriorated. During these times she advises forgoing the responsibilities to work or family, reducing the social life to one or two trusted friends, and living in "an atmosphere of quiet simplicity." Unlike a mental illness, this condition should not include a disturbance of the thought processes. Such heightened sensitivity is relatively rare and Kennett wrote that it is usually part of a major breakthrough in religious understanding. She indicates that "It is not a cause for worry and should be allowed to take place unhindered... In time the ability to deal with everyday matters will return in full, and with it a greater strength, efficiency and wisdom than one had previously known."[18]

In addition to using a meditative mind and absolute love and respect while doing the mudras, Kennett warned that the person receiving the treatment must be willing to face whatever may arise in the body and mind, accept it, and embrace it with love and with the faith that at the origin of every desire and act, no matter how bizarre and destructive, there is something pure and undefiled. Otherwise the treator will needlessly expend tremendous energy and become drained, exhausted and possibly more susceptible to illness.

Reichian & Neo-Reichian Therapies

Styles of bodywork at the opposite end of the scale from the gentle Anma massage mudras are Reichian and neo-Reichian therapies. These methods combine breathing processes and vigorous body movements, along with the manipulations of the therapist, to free the physical system from blocks or "armoring" which restrain energy. Wilhelm Reich, a controversial physician who studied with Freud and practiced as a Freudian analyst in the early years of his career, was the founder of this style of western body-oriented psychotherapy. He developed an interest in the physical aspects of an individual's character, and believed that successful therapy meant the client was completely orgasmic, able to expand and contract the body fully. He said neurosis was caused by the inhibition of this capacity due to the structure and demands of society.

Reich experimented with the body and determined that "armoring" kept physical sensations from coming to awareness. He said this armoring occurred because the organism made energetic decisions at the time of a trauma that caused it to contract and hold on to muscular tension. Psychological learning was not enough to release this problem. The body also needed help. He developed a theory of various character types correlated with typical patterns of armoring.

Eventually Reich identified an energy he called "orgone" energy, in its cosmic, primordial state, and labeled "ether" when it was expressed in the human body. "Cosmic orgone energy functions in the living organism as specific biological energy. As such, it governs the entire organism; it is expressed in the emotions as well as in the purely biophysical movement of the organs."[19] Orgone was a primal cosmic energy of the universe, according to Reich, and it was possible that the physical reality underlying concepts of "God" and "ether" might be this same orgone energy. He defined cosmic orgone energy as being primordial, universally existent, all-permeating, the origin of all energy and matter, being biological energy in the living being and the origin of the galactic system in the universe.[20]

Orgone energy flows up and down the body, parallel to the spine, according to Reich. Rings of armor are formed at right angles to this flow and operate to sever it. In Reichian therapy deep breathing is used to build an energy charge in the body that can dissolve the armor, and physical pressure is placed on the chronically tense muscles by the therapist. Cathartic expression is encouraged, along with working through whatever resistances or emotional restrictions arise.[21] According to psychologists James Fadiman and Robert Frager:

> Reich felt that the process of armoring created two distorted intellectual traditions which form the basis of civilization: mystical religion and mechanistic science. Mechanists are so well armored that they have no real sense of their own life processes or inner nature. They have a basic fear of deep emotion, aliveness and spontaneity. They tend to develop a rigid, mechanical conception of nature and are interested primarily in external objects and the natural sciences....Mystics have not developed their armoring so completely; they remain partly in touch with their own life energy and are capable of great insight because of this partial contact with their innermost nature. However, Reich saw this insight as distorted, because mystics tend to become ascetic and antisexual, to reject their own physical nature, and to lose contact with their own bodies. [22]

Reich saw religion as counter-productive to human health, and was also frequently at odds with society because of his radical views of sexuality, and his insistence on marketing a machine that was supposed to capture orgone energy. But his comments and descriptions of orgone clearly match the descriptions of prana in eastern scriptures. And he developed ways of working with the breath and body that break through armoring and release vibrations, pleasurable energy charges, feelings of hot and cold, prickling, itching and emotional arousal, in much the same way that meditation and pranayama practices release physical blocks.

It is probable that the energy Reich identified is both pranic energy and Kundalini energy, depending on the intensity and level of consciousness that is experienced, and that people engaging in bodywork with a Reichian base, including Bioenergetics, and many neo-Reichian bodywork spin-offs, are potentially able to release enough armoring to open the system to Kundalini. However the limitation of doing this work with a body therapist who is chiefly focused on releasing sexual expression would be that the intensified pranic energy would end up primarily expressed through the lower chakras, bringing more sex and power and stability into one's life (or possibly more difficulties in dealing with these energies), but not fully energizing and expressing the upper chakra energies, which respond to and deepen a spiritual orientation. Reich did not recognize the energies he discovered as being an aspect of consciousness, which is an inherent perspective of the yogic and Vedantic models.

Although his goals were usually expressed in terms of sexual energy, Reich did value the releasing of the heart energies. According to Baker, holding in the chest is equated with heartbreak, bitter sobbing, rage, reaching, and longing. These are deep emotions which need to be expressed and relieved in order for a genuine expression of love to become possible. Baker wrote "It must be remembered that most of what passes for love is really not love at all but is based on the anxiety or hate present in armored man where all natural impulses, particularly love, are inhibited." [23]

Another interesting correlate of Reichian therapy and yoga is the stages that occur in sequence as layers of armoring are removed. According to Baker "First, anxiety occurs. Then emotion is released -- rage, contempt, spite, crying, etc. After the emotion is expressed, there is a sense of relief. Third, contactlessness appears. There is no desire to move and the patient is temporarily stuck. A stage where the repressed and repressing forces are equal has been reached."[24]

He points out that inner loneliness or deadness may emerge in this process, including an inability to make human contact, and orgasm anxiety. He believes, in contrast to the yogic theories promoting sexual continence in order to retain energy for higher experiences, that these conditions indicate "the last form of neurotic contactlessness to show itself and the final hurdle that must be surmounted before health is established..." In addition, he points to an emptiness of life or experience that accompanies orgasm anxiety, along with "superficial communications and a disinclination to speak of genital desires, a sudden deepening of reserve, fears that the body will come apart, falling dreams and fantasies, flight from meaningful relations with the world (including sexual relations), and a return to infantile reactions and to earlier symptoms. . ."[25]

These symptoms are remarkably similar to some of those reported by mystics and people in Kundalini processes, and it is possible Baker's approach to breaking these impasses could be used effectively with them; however, this might be counter-productive for the spiritual goals of those who practice yoga, which generally advocates renouncing worldly attachments and pleasures, including sexuality. Reichian therapy encourages people to become more expressive and more alive in every aspect of their life, rather than to channel energy into spiritual purposes. I believe these contrasts highlight a major struggle for western spiritual seekers -- whether it is best to freely live and express their entire beings or to withdraw and withhold themselves in order to heighten spiritual awakening. It is possible that such splits are resolved through higher levels of integration when people have passed through the Kundalini stage of awakening, and are capable of using heartfelt connection with others as a spiritual practice.

Psychologists and neo-Reichian therapists Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks encourage the releasing of energy through all the chakras, and do neo-Reichian work with a focus on energy and space, rather than limiting the focus to body musculature. They believe this creates an environment that enhances the potential for spiritual experience. Clients appear able to expand and focus their consciousness into subtle and causal realms of experience, becoming more "alive" in dimensions beyond the physical body. I have observed several people move into spiritual experiences when doing Radiance Breathwork, and then experience the subsequent transformation of living with higher levels of energy.

Reich, like Freud, created a system to expand human concepts of consciousness and facilitate Self-awareness, but both were limited in their vision, possibly due to the personal trauma of their respective childhood's, or because of the sexually repressive society of their time. They provided a groundwork in lower-chakra psychology that was expanded to include issues of the upper chakras by Jung and the many humanistic and transpersonal therapies that followed.

Fire Meets Fire: Sexuality & Spiritual Awakening

In sharp contrast to Reich's views, yogic literature makes it abundantly clear that celibacy is the highest choice if one follows a spiritual path. This is not for moral reasons, but to marshall and redirect pranic energies, and to reduce the distractibility and attachment generated by desires for the opposite sex. References to this ideal often arouse tension in western spiritual seekers, who may react with feelings of anxiety, self-denigration, guilt, denial and hostility. Instead of acknowledging celibacy as a tool that is useful for some, at some stages of the process, they overlay cultural dogma on the concept and consider it avoidance of evil.

Control of the senses is essential for yogis who wish to contain and direct their energies beyond material concerns, and some Sanscrit scriptures maintain that no one who is sexually active has any hope of attaining the highest levels of spiritual awakening. In the male-dominated society of Vedic India many monks tended to view a female as evil simply because of the distracting temptations which were associated with sexual attractiveness, and some monks refused ever to look at a woman. Women in India still suffer from discrimination and separatist attitudes to some extent because of the anxieties of spiritually-striving males who see them as obstacles on the path to liberation.

The recognition of the value of sexual energy in the tantric tradition introduced a new option for a brief period of history, in which the female might be embraced as a goddess, and the path to freedom be sought through ritual use of the senses, including highly evolved sexual practices in which energy could be raised mutually and merged simultaneously between male and female partners. There is evidence that this was also the understanding of earlier matriarchal cultures which included goddess cults. This secret and advanced ritual was intended only for those who had already achieved advanced stages of spiritual consciousness, and were accomplished in the arts of concentration, meditation and mastery of the senses. The purpose was not to encourage sexual practices but to enable the seeker to transcend sexual attraction or desire, and to channel the secretions of sexual intercourse upward through the sushumna so they could be used to transform consciousness and revitalize the body. Such teachings are not generally condoned today and are considered an embarrassment by many spiritual, political and intellectual leaders in India.

Sexual and materialistic excesses such as those of Bhagvan Rajneesh, who taught tantric practices in both India and the U.S., have further damaged the reputation of this ancient art, which is greatly misunderstood in the West. In fact most Westerners who have heard the term "tantra" mistakenly believe it is only concerned with sexual practices, as if it were a rather glorified elaboration of the Kama Sutra. The fact is sexual rituals were never a major part of the right-handed tantric tradition, and in many cases were considered only in symbolic visualizations or used by only a small number of advanced yogis who had mastered many other levels of sensate detachment, and could easily achieve samadhi. The Buddhist tantric tradition is also rich in visualization, discipline. structure, and ritual, and is focused on enlightenment and living for the good of all sentient beings, not sexuality..

Where it is still practiced, sexual tantra is as secretive as ever in India, but occasionally it is available in the West in abbreviated versions, brought by a handful of people who practice yoga or teach ways to enhance sexuality. There is often little concern about the spiritual aspects, the preparedness of the aspirant, or the ritual elements of the practice, which must make it a far different experience than it would be if practiced in the purist tradition. True tantric practice was never meant to be for indulgence of the senses or improving one's sexual life. It was used to awaken and move energy in a way that transcended all further need for sexuality or other earthly pleasures and attachments. What it teaches is control and surrender, along with methods of using breath and concentration to channel sexual energy upward through the spine into the crown chakra. Semen and female secretions are changed into a form of energy called *ojas*.

I am not qualified to discuss in depth the essence of tantric practices, but I believe it is important to acknowledge their existence as a viable path for spiritual experiences, and to point as well to the lack of a requirement for celibacy in many mystical traditions. Tibetan lamas and Muslim or Indian Sufi teachers often have wives and families. In fact, a Sufi "Pir" or teaching lineage is traditionally passed from father or mother to son or daughter. Jewish Kabbalah, Buddhist, Shamanic and Native American traditions do not view celibacy as a prerequisite for enlightenment. A number of Christian saints were married and had families. These facts may offer some perspective to those meditators who believe they must suppress all sexual urges.

Sexual energy may intensify during spiritual awakening because it is a central part of the very life force one is encouraging. Overwhelming sexual desire can occur because of Kundalini moving through a nadi called Vajra which connects the sexual organs and the brain. Interest in sexual activity can also decrease, as if the energy has been siphoned off into other tasks. Kundalini subjects reported a wide range of sexual patterns. The following attitudes and practices have been reported by people who have awakened Kundalini.

1. Some practice celibacy.
2. Some feel intensified sexual energy and are highly active sexually.
3. Some people feel swamped with waves of sexual energy and are frightened or embarrassed by it, but wait for it to pass and restrain action.
4. Some have sexual experiences with partners which move them past the confines of ordinary consciousness and generate intense altered-state experiences.
5. Some use sexuality as an outlet for intensified energies so they can relax and release tension.
6. Some have little or no interest in sex, or feel great fluctuations in their desires. Or they may feel physically uncomfortable, with their energy "out of control" if

they become sexually aroused. Most will experience a desire for celibacy during certain stages of the process.

7. Some break their celibacy occasionally, finding that it relieves depression or stress to do so.

8. Some practice containing the energy, limiting sexual activity to once a month or less, simply to manage energy and desire more consciously.

9. Some feel Kundalini has little or no impact on their sexual lives.

10. Some report awakening Kundalini or having strong uncomfortable pranic energy rushes following sexual involvement with an awakened partner.

11. Some report occasional or frequent spontaneous orgasms occurring with no external stimulus.

12. Some generate sexual energy and channel it upward through the chakra system in order to experience whole-body orgasmic sensations, or what seems like "brain-orgasms" to several people.

13. Some believe in sublimating sexual desire into creative activity and work. Others do yoga practices that turn the sublimated energy into *ojas* and move it through sushumna nadi to expand spiritual consciousness.

Clearly the variations are great and there is no universal pattern. Although many "saints" advocated and practiced celibacy, believing that sexual involvement was a hindrance in their spiritual work, there is no real evidence that sexuality prevents spiritual awakening. However it is possible there may be levels of realization that one cannot penetrate while still sexually active, and it is probably more difficult to accomplish mastery of the mind. Preoccupation or obsession with sexual concerns will generate less energy in the direction of spiritual practice and may keep one attached to the gross body. It also seems unlikely that one who can penetrate reality to the level of Nirvikalpa Samadhi would care to have the distraction of a sexual partner at the moment. This is unnecessary and irrelevant to an experience which lies far beyond the senses. I expect that sexual tantric practices lead people more commonly into subtle-body energies and bliss, and not into the higher stages of samadhi.

From a therapeutic perspective there is no clear direction, other than to encourage moderation and self-acceptance, and respect for the individual desires and needs of the aspirant. It is clear that some people who practice yoga and adopt rigid sexual attitudes are suffering from deep sexual conflicts and fears, and adopt these beliefs to justify sexual repression. Such patterns of self-denial and self-rejection interfere not only with mental health but with the capacity to attain spiritual fulfillment: the energy cannot properly awaken and move, the heart cannot open, and no surrender is possible. Individuals are best advised to seek inner intuition as to which path or practices to follow at any given time, letting go of any tendency to be guided by rigid belief systems and fear.

Most who have awakened and learned to live with higher levels of spiritual energy will probably find sexuality to be uncomfortable if it is done out of obligation, or with partners who cannot match them energetically. Sex as an act of release loses its flavor in the face of the ecstatic vibrations that accompany the energy of the Self. On the other hand, when sexual energy is exchanged between two people who know how to engage and blend this energy at all levels it can take them to new and rare heights, as if they are merging separate selves, and stimulate extraordinary vitality and well-being.

I have spoken with a Kundalini master and Ayurvedic practitioner in India who attributed the accumulation of toxins to certain sexual activities, including having multiple partners, oral sex and anal sex. He stated that such activities disturb the proper directional movement of prana through the nadi system and create blockages which cause difficult kriya activity when Kundalini is activated. Facial tics and hyper-emotionality can also be undesirable consequences. He said that adults who were abused sexually as children may also experience exaggerated kriya activity and hyper-emotionality if they awaken Kundalini, as well as the flooding of repressed memories related to the abuse. This is supported in my view by the experiences of clients in my practice who were the victims of childhood sexual abuse.

Ultimately, spirituality should not become life-negating but life-empowering, and those who engage it need channels for expression that encourage it to expand and be lived on the planet. Some ways this may occur are through service, creative expression or relationship. There is a time to sublimate all of oneself to the influence of the divine, and a time to bring one's awakened consciousness of the divine into the living patterns of daily life.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THOSE SURGING WAVES OF EGO IDENTITY: THE EMOTIONAL CRUCIBLE

A dream --I am in a boat full of people, docked in shallow water. I get off. I put my hand along the bow and it begins to turn over. I try to catch it and can't. In a minute it is upside down and sinking. People and things keep floating up from the depths. I and others watch as hands and legs reach up and we seem much larger than the boat and pull people out. It's like fishing toys out of a bathtub. I am anxious that someone may have drowned but the water is only about 8 feet deep so people can be pulled upright. Finally it seems everyone is out of the water and the boat floats up empty. I pick it up like it is a toy, tip it to drain out excess water, and set it back on the sea. It appears no one drowned.... Subject, Chris.

Immense waves of emotional turmoil may swamp the individual who is struggling to integrate the spiritual Self. There are many possible sources for this upheaval. Some of it may simply be biochemical or hormonal reactions to intensified energy. Irregardless of the source, a great inner struggle is at hand. All the old values and beliefs are up for grabs, as the world perspective shifts. Those egoic attachments, even for the comforts of home and family, the security of work one enjoys, the desires for travel or relationship or whatever else has shaped the motivations of the personality, begin slipping away, falling back into the unconscious. They may seem irrelevant or empty. One feels naked, isolated, separated.

Paradoxically, great waves of bliss, a sense of belonging, and unitive awareness may flood the psyche, alternated by blackness and a confrontation with the existential void. It becomes possible to recognize the dynamics of the personal ego and the shallowness of attachments with a clarity that is far beyond rationalization. When a person is drifting in a nihilistic bliss this does not seem such a loss, but when the ego returns to shape a way to live in western society, a massive struggle for integration is called for. Emotions rise and fall like a surly ocean and one is challenged to navigate them.

Fear

One of my favorite pieces of advice regarding effective treatments for spiritual crisis is this statement by Da Free John:

> Heartfelt release of fear is the secret of passing through the spiritual process without going mad. To the degree that you are full of fear, you limit your experience -- and if experience is forced upon you, then you have no ability while fearful to view it sanely, to relax and surrender within it. You cannot surrender by relaxing and trying to feel better. You can surrender only by giving yourself up, relaxing your self-hold, surrendering your mind altogether to the Transcendental Consciousness in which it arises, and yielding your body to the All-

> Pervading Current of Life, of which it is but a temporary modification.[1]

Free John wrote that the emotional problem of self-division is the root of all suffering and delusion. People are not relaxed in the heart, and are afraid and contracted against the experience of being in contact with divine being which is manifest everywhere. His writings suggest that the way toward integration lies in embracing all of life as the Divine, staying open to the moment and whatever it brings. He said that allowing oneself the freedom to love and be ecstatic is the only way to happiness, yet most people are so contracted against this that no amount of Kundalini energy can touch it. The only solution for this "emotional recoil" is to enter into a relationship with God as an intimate and heartfelt companion in your life. He called this the cure for a loveless life of suffering.[2]

Many people suffer from a tendency to be self-negating, and a difficulty in freely experiencing and expressing love. The persona is adapted to protect against recognizing this contraction or block -- it supports the image and the belief system regarding who we are, telling us how to fit into life, providing a role and the sense of belonging. If Kundalini awakens and one denies the wider consciousness it brings, it appears that nothing of value can happen, although much struggle may still occur. Westerners who have resolved issues related to identity, relationship and self-actualization are better prepared to integrate the Kundalini experience, because they have learned to face uncomfortable truths about themselves and to respond to the inward impetus for growth and change. Those who are trapped by more rigid patterns, or come from a negative spiritual tradition, where God is associated with punishment and judgment, sometimes fear this activity is an evil force punishing or possessing them.

In addition to fears about oneself, some people feel a terror regarding the energy itself, as if they are being invaded, especially if they have never considered a potential association between physical energy and spirituality. For people in traditional or fundamentalist religious systems, it is shocking and guilt-inducing to have spontaneous sexual fantasies or orgasmic sensations when praying. I have found clients to be greatly surprised and relieved to learn that it is not uncommon for sexual energy to arise when one is intensely engaged in prayer and meditation. It is not the work of the devil but the activity of the subtle body energy field interacting with human physiology. The first stirrings of Kundalini are sometimes felt as increased vibration, itching, or tingling in the genital area, and the deeply altered and relaxed consciousness of sincere prayer or meditation can stimulate this sensation.

Among many clients I have met since the initial publication of this book, I have found that the reaction of fear is especially acute in people with a history of repressed physical or sexual abuse, who find the awakening Kundalini energy has awakened childhood memories. Many experiences of transcendent states are quite similar to disassociative states occuring during childhood abuse so that the entire complex is reactivated. Such people are forced prematurely into the need to do their "recovery" work, a problem that is amplified by the disruption of their normal energy and emotional states. In addition, the patterning of feeling physical safety in the world, which should be the birthright of every human, is often inadequate due to abuse and neglect. People who integrate this process easily often have a life-long, possibly cellular, sense of safety and well-being in the world, that can be transferred into a willingness to accept and explore this new experience.

Although Free John's "heartfelt release of fear" and the "creation of a relationship with God" is advisable, it may be difficult for the average person to attain. In the interim the most effective antidotes to fear are to understand the process, find supportive and understanding confidants, seek therapy to deal with psychological issues, and accept the experience. It can help to explore creative and active methods of confronting the fear -- personifying it as the "child" within or as a sub-personality, drawing it, dancing it, listening to its story, having a dialogue with it. There is a fearful self and a wise self in each of us and we need to clarify who we wish to be in charge, without negating either voice.

Anger

In an article written in "The Dawn Horse" newspaper, an interviewer asked Irina Tweedie, author of Chasm of Fire, about a passage in her book where she related beating a mouse to a pulp in an outburst of anger. "How did your guru explain this?" he asked. She replied "This sudden anger is one of the symptoms of Kundalini. At that moment, I realized with horror that I could have killed a human being. But when I talked to Bhai Sahib about it, he very calmly said 'Oh yes, those things do occur'. When the Kundalini awakens, one can have the most terrible moments of irrational anger. One goes beyond it,of course. Later on, the symptoms are different."[3]

Both Da Free John and Aurobindo offer advice on moving beyond constricted feelings by witnessing. Aurobindo said that in the face of negative emotions "Somewhere deep down we shall feel the Witness in us who is not touched -- who is never touched -- who does not suffer. There are falls and there are rising and each time one rises up stronger. The only sin is to be discouraged."[4]

Da Free John said we must notice that it is we who are making us unhappy, emotionally disturbed or limited -- we discover this by observing ourselves no matter what we are doing. He encourages people to be present as "unobstructed" feeling instead of contracting against feelings, saying that when there is no contraction, what is felt is absolute bliss, which changes the experience of the universe. He wrote: "You will not interpret manifest existence to be evil or suffering or sinful, or others to be unloving, or life to be terrible. Instead of that, you will regard all of manifest existence to be pervaded by Bliss -- not merely Bliss coming at you from every direction, but Bliss radiating from every direction in the place where you stand. This Bliss has no center, no bounds, no limits. It is free energy." [5]

The contraction one experiences when locked in anger and fear may be released through opening of the heart chakra, which is a significant phase of the spiritual process in many esoteric traditions, signifying the movement from lower to higher chakra energies. When this occurs the personality can more easily cope with the emotional issues of the lower chakras that may activate during Kundalini movement. It becomes possible for love to direct the process. Meditation on the heart chakra is a yogic method of addressing this transformation, and acupressure treatments focused on the heart meridian can also be useful for this kind of release.

Depression & Mood Swings

Many meditators have been surprised to discover that following experiences of bliss and peace in meditation, and believing they have made gains toward a spiritual life, they suddenly encounter moodiness, doubts, anxiety, guilt and depression. In addition, as spiritual commitment deepens it seems as if a splitting away of ordinary consciousness may occur as connection is made with the inner Self, and then life as it was previously lived is no longer satisfying, and activities of the old persona have no congruence with the inner being. Alienation from friends may occur if they cannot understand the process.

While the former identity feels unnatural, identification with the new Self may bring ambivalence or inflation. Such spiritual ideals as liberation and non-attachment are usually unappealing to the ego and may be discounted as fantasy or impossibility. As people become more conscious of the process the sacrifices and difficulties become more clear. They may feel torn between wanting to release worldly desires, and feeling panic as ordinary interests fall away. They may feel bliss and joy in meditation, but flatness and deadness in living.

B.S. Goel wrote of his despair over the psychic fluctuations and bouts of uncontrollable weeping he endured. He was haunted by fears of death and insanity until he had to give up his work. His self-confidence plummeted. He wrote: "A genuine case of Kundalini arousal is in the grip of veritable hell during the initial five or six months. The states of confusion and bewilderment are so intense that they are beyond the reach and understanding of any intellect. The fears of death and insanity are very acute. The reason for such a situation is that the mind organized on the old ideas and formations is shaken completely and gets disorganized..."[6]

Goel eventually noticed that such periods of suffering were followed by an inexplicable state of relaxation for a few hours. He believed the tendency to ups and downs was due to becoming caught in worldly delusions, which are being burned away by the rising Kundalini. When the pain becomes unbearable, the inner guru makes a contact to release this obsession and produce sudden peace, stability and bliss. In his experience the pain was so intense during the downward pull that he could not even hope for peace, but wept uncontrollably, or ran for help.

It is reassuring to know, from the autobiographies and case histories, that many spiritual aspirants who suffer from such traumas do move beyond feelings of doubt and despair, because in the West when individuals are caught up in these feelings there is no place to go for reassurance. Traditional western culture would simply agree that spiritual aspirants should forget their introverted processes and get on with living. Standard methods of dealing with depression in therapy may include medication, helping clients to express anger, or promoting behavioral changes. In my experience these are not particularly healing approaches for Kundalini clients, unless the depression is chronic or was triggered by specific life events.

An intervention more appropriate to the process would be to observe and witness the moods, and to teach clients to carry the tension of opposing forces patiently until the unconscious allows them to shift. They need to know their feelings are commonly experienced by mystics, and to be encouraged to go on with their life the best they are able and trust the moods will pass. They need to be reminded of the joys or bliss, the highest of their experiences, and reassured these will return. The lives of mystics suggest that one cannot exist permanently in a stage of bliss until all karma and personality issues have been released, or true liberation occurs.

Some people find it helpful to adopt an attitude of acceptance and of surrendering their feelings to God, or they cite meditation, acupressure, breathwork, massage, hot baths, understanding friends, the expression of feelings, and making love as having the potential for relieving depressions. In the yogic literature the ability to wait out these moods, to practice right living, to continue with disciplined practices, to read scriptures, and to depend on the guru are more traditional methods. Aurobindo (1971) said "All limitations can be surmounted...by calling in a higher power and consciousness than that of the personal mind and will. The higher consciousness can, by what it brings, correct or rebuild what is defective in the personal nature."[7] He believed one of the first tasks necessary for spiritual seekers was to achieve a settled peace and silence in the mind, and equanimity in the being, trusting that happiness comes from the satisfaction of the soul rather than of the emotions or the body, which can never be satisfied.

Theosophist Alice Bailey advised that one may pass through great difficulties by learning to stand with steadfastness in spite of all that one may do and feel, realizing that the cyclic condition is related to the pairs of opposites and is part of the life manifestation of existence itself. According to Bailey, during cycles of reincarnation the soul experiences periods of being outgoing and extroverted that are followed immediately with lives of introversion and introspection, with apparent lack of interest in relationships and environment. Between these two extremes we may flounder, sometimes for many lives, until the opposites are blended. Then the dual roles of a spiritual aspirant become clear and both aspects come together so that one may live a life of both service and reflection.

While this process occurs, Bailey wrote, a definite work moves forward in the etheric body and energies of the lower centers become refocused above the diaphragm. She identified the solar plexus as the most potent center, the clearing house for the personality forces, and said that movement through this center causes great upheaval.[8]

Several people I interviewed reported particular difficulties in the solar plexus ranging from nausea to indigestion, to the feeling that a boa constrictor was inside. Bodywork focused on the solar plexus, abdominal breathing, yoga asanas or meditations on this chakra (the manipura), could be helpful for those caught in these upheavals.

Aurobindo also wrote of a depression and moodiness that may follow the first connections with higher consciousness, after one falls back into an ordinary state. There can be overwhelming depression, disappointment and despair, or a sense of being stagnant, as if no further progress can be made on the spiritual journey. Other depressing factors may be the awareness of personal imperfections or a sudden eruption of doubt. In such states Aurobindo reported "One feels as if the very ground were cut away from under one's feet and that one had nowhere to turn to for solace or encouragement. One comes sometimes even to think of giving up the yogic life and returning to the ordinary ways of worldly dreams. All this is a state of bleak forlorness and corroding gloom."[9]

He suggested that the remedy comes when one refuses to brood over the fall and recovers through making "contact with the psychic being and infusing its fire and light into the physical mind. Once the rays of the soul penetrate and permeate the physical mind it will tend to lose its habitual tendency to doubt and depression and develop the capacity for sustained aspiration, devotion and self-offering. Step back from the physical mind, which is the home of doubt and dependency and try to take one's stand in the inner consciousness."[10]

Since this experience can shatter the entire base on which the ego stands -- all the previous beliefs, relationships, and psychic structures of life -- people should not be surprised or self-critical if they find they are caught in panic or despair. Aurobindo said "There can be no doubt that you can go through -- everyone has these struggles; what is needed to pass through is sincerity and perseverance." He advised remaining in the higher part of consciousness, putting a pressure on the lower impulses to change. Once this becomes a habit "the progress is easier, smoother and less painful."[11]

Love --Variations on the Theme

In addition to radical mood swings, and the many negative emotions, love is another emotion which causes havoc for some people during Kundalini awakening. Goel cites an irrational love projection on the daughter of a friend, and one subject interviewed experienced a similar infatuation with her therapist. Heart openings produce intense loving energy, often projected on a teacher or guru, sometimes felt as an overwhelming wave of compassion for the entire world. Mystics will channel this passion toward a love of God or of nature, or service to humanity.

Bailey wrote that of the problems of disciples, those arising from the awakened heart center are perhaps the most common and most difficult to handle. She said that "In the early stages, this inflowing love-force establishes personality contacts which veer between the stages of wild devotion and utmost hate on the part of the person affected by the disciple's energy. This produces constant turmoil in the disciple's life, until he has become adjusted to the effects of his energy distribution, and also frequent disruption of relationships and frequent reconciliations.

The problem is overcome when one learns to stand firm at the center, loving impersonally. The problems that spiritual leaders frequently have with individuals and groups Bailey attributes to this problem of the heart energy and its impact on others.[12]

Several subjects were given teachings about love from inner guides during their process, and others experienced feeling unconditional love. This is a primary and fundamental aspect of God, according to most spiritual teachings, and learning to be with love in its purest state is part of the development of spiritual life. Unconditional love is not a familiar experience for most of us, and loving without a particular object is difficult to maintain, so projections are engaged. The personality just naturally wants someone special to give it to. Learning to love God as expressed in every aspect of the universe is one of the highest intentions of the spiritual practice, and one of the most difficult to attain.

Richard Moss emphasizes the act of realizing unconditional love as the second step in transmuting and refining negative energies. (The first step is the realization "that all experience is relative and the direct consequence of its underlying energy dynamic.") He wrote:

> Love is the great transmuting force that can take any fixed energetic/existential pattern and allow it to resolve into harmony on a much greater scale. Without *unconditional love as the center from which to concentrate our Beingness, the ability to shift and transmute energies can become just another manipulation of our ego power.* It is critical to understand this.[13]

He acknowledges, however, that one cannot make unconditional love happen by thinking about it. In his personal process he engaged in what he called a "knock-down-drag-out fight" by sitting with his negative energy until it transmuted even if it took a week. He said "At first the state I was working to transmute would intensify and my being would seethe like a volcano, and then as I stayed with this I would become blank. Still I kept returning my awareness to the heart and waiting."[14]

He believed that if he drifted off to other thoughts or had a wonderful insight it was simply a displacement of awareness into acceptable territory and was not transmutation. So he continued in this intense introspective state until he experienced a deep feeling state of well-being that emanated from his chest. "Then I would reexamine the issue from this higher state to see the assumptions about reality that had allowed it to configurate in the first place. I found that in this expanded state I could marry divisive issues to each other and could appreciate the energy process inherent in their activation."

As he followed this practice it became more comfortable, even automatic, and seemed to go beyond emotional issues into what he calls issues "of the soul itself". He discovered that "the existential fear that at times would sweep through me early in the awakening process was in fact a miraculous sensation of embodiment to a higher level of my being. The even deeper patterns and reality frames began to transmute into a more and more unconditional and eternal sense of Self." 15

What Moss developed in this process is much like a tantric practice, of being completely with an emotion until it transforms into its elemental energy beyond form, and moving energy from lower chakras into the deepest level of the heart chakra, where unconditional love can transform it. Unconditional love is without judgment, values or design. It is more an intense presence, encompassing and blessing all that is, without boundary or parameter. It is the emotion or feeling component of the consciousness/ energy of Kundalini. One cannot "do" it -- one can only become immersed within it.

The Struggle to Be

As we assess the emotional difficulties experienced by someone who is dealing with Kundalini energy, remember that most people respond to change with anxiety, and the changes engendered by this opening can profoundly and permanently alter the inner structure of a man or woman. People can become stuck in the middle, unable to go back to the old perspective and afraid to plunge forward into the new.

In addition, one may be confronted with what Aurobindo (sounding like C.G. Jung) termed the "shadow" or the "negative persona", a being attached to one, sometimes appearing like a part of oneself and sometimes a force in the environment, "which is just the contradiction of the thing he centrally represents in the work to be done."[16] This energy "seems to oppose, create stumblings and wrong conditions, in a word, to set before him the whole problem of the work he has started to do." The Mother has stressed the same phenomenon, stating that with the possibility of a victory, one always carries inside the opposing elements:

> When you see a very black shadow somewhere, something that is truly painful, you may be sure that you have the possibility of the corresponding light...Always you will find that within you the shadow and the light go together: you have a capacity, you have also the negation of that capacity...It is up to you to know how to utilize the one to realize the other.[17]

Although the work to integrate these forces is essential, the potential for stepping aside from the emotions and turmoil engendered by this confrontation and mastering them as yogic teachers encourage, is supported conceptually by Jung, who said people can lose themselves in emotions and become depleted, as if burnt to bits. He said it is like insanity, when one cannot get out of it. He wrote:

> There is a possibility of detaching oneself from an emotion, however, and when a man discovers this, he becomes man. In manipura he is in the womb of nature, extraordinarily automatic; it is merely a process. But in anahata a new thing comes up, the possibility of lifting himself above the emotional happenings and looking at them. He discovers the purusha in his heart... In the centre of anahata Siva again appears in the form of the linga, and the small flame means the first germ-like apparition of the Self.... It is the withdrawal from the emotions; you are no longer identical with them. If you succeed in making a difference between yourself and that out-

> burst of passion, you begin to discover the Self. In anahata individuation begins.[18]

Much of the emotional turmoil described in literature about Kundalini is echoed in Jung's comments about working with the deep unconscious. He saw regression becoming increasingly dangerous as advanced stages of psychological development are reached.

> Any higher development of consciousness is tremendously dangerous. We are generally inclined to think that it is ideal and desirable to develop toward a higher condition, but we forget that it is dangerous, because the development usually means sacrifice, it costs blood. The great changes in consciousness in human history have always been connected with sacrifice....There are cases where the psychological development of an individual leads to his destruction, where he cannot stand the tension....That is why all the mystery cults, or Yoga teachings, warn their adepts to be careful; these things have to be surrounded by extraordinary precautions, one has to protect oneself. One has to follow the rules and fulfill all sorts of conditions to avoid falling into terrible danger.[19]

Yogic literature offers many rules for managing this process, although primarily it advises reliance on a guru. One of the oldest documents offering some advice on Kundalini management is the Jnaneshvari version of the Bhagavadgita, which recommends casting off egoism, practicing self-examination, and trusting the strength of the Self.

In describing how one crosses over the "river of illusion" and enters into union, this scripture describes difficulties in doing this by one's own efforts. In order to acquire the self-control necessary the mind must be fixed in the innermost place of the heart, curing the tendency to run after external objects (which is only possible when the senses are restrained). When the mind is silent and the attention fixed, the life breath should be transmitted into the sacred syllable (Aum) and brought up by the central path (sushumna) to the brow center, then held with firm resolution. This practice develops mastery and self-restraint, devotion to God, and the awareness that leads to enlightenment. With devotion all existence can be seen as the manifestation of God, and the devotee remains humble and free of conceit.[20]

Yogi Alain Danielou also offers practices that can develop equanimity and mental purity. He recommends creating a pure place within, and establishing a pure direction. In his writings, purity means control of the senses, absence of fear, contentment of mind, charity, ritual sacrifices, penance, simplicity, non-violence, truth, endurance, and forgiveness. He tells us to abstain from self-assertion, possessiveness, attachment, enmity, envy, greed, sensuality, anger, and agitation. One should also follow food restrictions, seek contentment, austerity, and self-development, and think constantly of divinity.[21]

The main obstacles that disturb the mind of a spiritual aspirant, according to Danielou, who quotes from the Yoga Darshana, are ill-health, irregular life, lack of success, lack of stability, laziness, material difficulties, lack of convictions, wrong ideas or wrong knowledge. The five secondary obstacles are physical pain, melancholy, unsteady limbs, and irregular in and out breathing. Other problems include unregulated eating and sleeping, breaking the rules of chastity, having an impostor as a guide, disregarding the true guide, atheism, desire for physical attainments, belief that attainments mean realization, having rituals performed by others, and pretension to being oneself a guide.

In contrast to yogic methods of controlling emotional states, alternative therapies dealing with deep emotional traumas encourage complete catharsis and emotional expression. Gestalt practices, bodywork, and breathwork are among these approaches. Stan and Christina Grof, who have pursued an in-depth study of spiritual crisis and Kundalini, utilize in Holotropic Therapy hyperventilation and the use of evocative music to change consciousness, by activating intense and dramatic release of emotion. They define the main principle of their work as "to encourage the experiencer to surrender fully to the emerging emotions, sensations, and physical energy, and find appropriate ways of expressing them through sounds, grimaces, postures, and movements, without judging or analyzing the experience....This work continues until the experiencer reaches a state of resolution and relaxation." 22

It is difficult to reconcile these opposite approaches of emotional mastery and cathartic release in dealing with emotions, both offered as activities to assist spiritual awakening, unless one looks at the psyche as having the possibility of releasing completely and moving beyond the trauma of previously lived emotional pain and blocks. There is a critical difference between being lost in an emotional trauma for weeks or months, and being focused on it in a therapeutic setting for a few hours. In Holotropic Therapy, breathing practices are in some ways akin to tantric practices that use the senses to take one beyond ordinary limitations.

In a meditation practice, when confronted with a painful memory, one is generally advised to observe it and hold back emotional surrender to it, although in practice uncontrollable weeping or anger may erupt. Letting it move on is the primary objective, avoiding the tendency to get caught in the drama.

In Holotropic Breathwork one releases fully to the expression, but with the intention of allowing it to move on, releasing oneself from the conditioned patterns that have previously limited or influenced the personality. The therapist is advised not to interfere in any way. As these experiences are transcended, new potentials for higher states of consciousness emerge. It is possible to leap beyond the personality during these altered-state processes, and see the entire experience from an expanded perspective. The Grofs emphasize the importance of distinguishing between the two entities of body-ego and Self, when engaging in transpersonal processes; otherwise the result can be ego-inflation or psychopathology. They also recommend using cathartic practices in a group setting, and if people are in a state of crisis, providing an environment free of the stresses of daily living.

Whether choosing to use Holotropic Breathwork or mastery of detachment as an approach for emotional healing, the factors to consider are personality style, disposition, health, ego structure, emotional stability, and available support systems following the therapy sessions.

Chanting as Emotional Release

Chanting (*swadhyaya*) and repeating the names of God (*japa*, or *mantra*) are also emphasized in some yogic scriptures. According to Ron Jones, psychologist and Siddha yoga teacher, chanting was the main practice recommended to followers by Muktananda because "It brings up joy, it focuses the mind and it organizes the psyche by tuning up all the chakras. It is a more active way of participating with the opening, and automatically introduces a form of pranayama."[23]

Muktananda said chanting focuses the mind on God, and makes one intoxicated all day, raising a seeker to a state beyond the mind. It makes the mind one-pointed and can also induce samadhi. Chanting draws one toward understanding of the inner self, increases inner radiance, mental vigor and agility, nourishes the inner being, imparts spiritual strength and purifies the mind and heart. He states "If you meditate and neglect chanting, then your heart will remain as dry as wood." [24]

None of the case subjects emphasized chanting or mantra recitation specifically as factors in their process, but TM meditation, which was an introduction to meditation for many of them, is based on mantra repetition, and others practiced yoga which sometimes included chanting experiences. Several subjects remarked on the importance of sound and inner tones in their process. Experimental studies on the outcome of chanting with people having difficulties with Kundalini might provide some interesting material for research.

Therapy with the self & the Self

C.G. Jung recognized the need in many Westerners for a personal spirituality, a genuine experience of the numinous, writing that the western tendency to project all religious experience outside of oneself may rob the soul of its values, making it incapable of further development and causing a person to get stuck in an unconscious state. He believed that as long as religion is only faith and outward form, and religious function is not experienced in the soul, nothing of importance can happen, and he said "the mysterium magnum is first and foremost rooted in the human psyche...It is high time we realized that it is pointless to praise the light and preach it if nobody can see it."[25]

Since much of Jung's work with the deep unconscious offers insight into the natural tendency of the psyche toward a spiritual perspective, it suggests potential applications for working with the Kundalini process. Jung mentions yoga and Kundalini energy frequently in The Collected Works, referring to images associated with Kundalini appearing in the dreams and art of patients.

Speaking of how Kundalini is awakened, during a lecture in 1932, Jung said it is an instigation from above which arouses her, and one must have a purified spirit in order to do so. He stated that in psychological terms, that would mean that you can approach the unconscious only in one way, namely, by a purified mind, by the right attitude, and by the grace of heaven. An inner urge must lead one to it, a guiding spark that forces one on.

> And that spark is the Kundalini, something absolutely unrecognizable, which may show perhaps as fear, as a neurosis, or apparently also as a vivid interest, but it must be something which is superior to your will. Otherwise you don't go through with it; you turn back at the first obstacle, as soon as you see the leviathan you run away. But if that living spark, that urge, that need, gets you by the neck, you cannot turn back, you have to face the music. [26]

Neurosis, fear and interest are definitively NOT Kundalini, although as pointed out earlier it is not uncommon to experience them as part of the awakening process. But in many ways Jung captures the crux of the experience -- the power and inevitability of being seized by an urge greater than oneself.

Jung also felt at the time that Westerners take a route to the unconscious that is the opposite to that taken by Easterners, the western process bringing us down into the unconscious, while the chakra system posits the movement as rising upward. His efforts to describe and define this difference, his view that the super-consciousness of yoga and the unconscious of analysis were the same, and his tendency to put aside the Hindu world view in his efforts at interpretation make his theoretical work related to this topic of limited value.

Nonetheless, Jungian approaches to the psyche can help a client to respect and integrate this process. Images, symbols, themes and dreams of the individuation process are strikingly similar to those of the Kundalini process. Jung spoke of the relation between analysis and religion in terms which could well define the confrontation with Kundalini, calling this relationship "an extended conflict in which the man as analyst and the religious man confront one another and search each other's depths. This confrontation becomes an enterprise which shuttles back and forth adjusting, recommencing; a proceeding which digs even deeper only to undo at each stage the composure we should love to achieve by saying yes, this time, the delusion is it."[27]

Jung also expressed a grave concern over the potentiality of the psyche to become lost in the unconscious, which suggests the risks of an unguided journey into the spiritual process, and said it is "a psychic catastrophe when the *ego is assimilated by the self* because the image of wholeness then remains in the unconscious so that on the one hand it shares the archaic nature of the unconscious and on the other finds itself in the psychically relative space-time continuum that is characteristic of the unconscious as such."[28]

If the Self assimilates the ego, one has merged into infinite chaos with no place to come home to. Conversely, if the ego assimilates the Self, inflation runs rampant, for the human has usurped the gods. The challenge is to create bridges between the two planes, so that the values of the deeper Self can be integrated into the patterns lived out by the ego self. Jung believed that "the more numerous and the more significant the unconscious contents which are assimilated to the ego, the closer the approximation of the ego to the Self, even though this approximation must be a never-ending process."[29] It is clear he perceived this as a profoundly spiritual undertaking.

According to analyst Jolande Jacobi, the term individuation process defines the possibility of development of a psychically whole individual, incorporating both conscious and unconscious components of the psyche in balanced and creative interaction. She defined the foremost task of this process as "to raise the God-images, that is their radiations and effects, to consciousness and thus establish a constant dynamic contact between the ego and the Self. This alliance bridges over the tendencies to personality dissociation which arise from the instincts pulling in opposite directions."[30] Her view of the individuation process offers insight into spiritual transformation as well.

> ...the discovery of a new life-form which goes hand in hand with the successful conduct of life as a whole depends on the degree to which a person is gripped by this transformation, adopts a positive attitude towards it, and is able to accomplish it. Very often the capacity for such a transformation does not depend on the objective bigness or smallness of the personality, but on the extension or "reconstruction" of its psychic "dimension". It is a situation of moving from an "ego-centered" attitude to an "ego-transcending" one, in which the guiding principles of life are directed to something objective...The individuation process in the Jungian sense means the conscious realization and integration of all the possibilities congenitally present in the individual. It is opposed to any kind of conformity and, as a therapeutic factor in analytical work, also demands the rejection of those prefabricated psychic matrices in which most people would like to live.[31]

Like individuation, Kundalini follows a unique and individual pattern, and refuses to tolerate conformity. The Kundalini process is unlike individuation for the yogi however, in the sense that the yogi attempts to surrender his or her entire being into the infinite, merging with the supraconscious. This is a task Jung did not recognize as healthy for the psyche. His work aims at keeping the ever-present dialogue going between Self and ego, integrating and working effectively with each side of consciousness.

The risks of identification with the numinous are great for the average person. One of the most difficult aspects for the Westerner in this process is that of going as deeply as the heart wills into the numinous, and still maintaining the balance to live among the demands and stresses of modern society. Ultimately, when the transformation is completed, it may be possible to live more fully from a deeper state of consciousness. But to reach that state of purity can take decades, and lifetimes, and in the meanwhile whoever is engaged in this experiment can benefit from the insights of analytical psychology in learning to balance the demands of two opposing psychic elements.

Jacobi further distinguishes the individuation process from ideas that seem prevalent in yoga and other doctrines defining the spiritualized being, by saying the process has in no sense a "moral" goal in the accepted meaning of the word. "It does not aim at perfectionism, but only at helping a man to become in the truest sense what he in fact is, and not to hide behind the ideal mask which is so easily mistaken for his true essence, although by so doing, he makes it all the more likely that the evil repressed behind it will break out." [32]

Jung's psychology focused primarily on the tasks of the second half of life, the time when the ego comes to terms with death, finds completion for the meaning of the individual life, and brings from the deep unconscious the material to complete wholeness. It may be especially appropriate therefore to use the techniques and processes of Jungian work with people in a Kundalini crisis, because they are also dealing with the struggle to face the death of parts of the ego and paradoxically expand their sense of wholeness. The capacity to witness, to work on symbolic content and to find a way to live that is in harmony with deep spiritual processes are all analogous to Jungian analysis.

A significant experience to one caught in a crisis of either individuation or Kundalini awakening is the battle of opposites -- forces arising from the unconscious that seem in direct conflict with the position of the ego. Yoga has attempted to address these "temptations" through strict discipline and order prescribed as preliminary practices before awakening Kundalini. Jungian psychology addresses these conflicts more directly as they appear in the process; when consciousness and the messages of the unconscious are in opposition, and no reconciliation seems possible, the analysand is encouraged to persevere until a tolerable solution occurs, and a third possibility emerges that does justice to both sides.[33] Jung commented in a lecture series on the interpretation of visions, that one can only withstand the onslaught of the opposites "by not being volatile in any way; you have to be heavy, like stone, to stand the movement that begins when you are their victim." [34]

Jung also demonstrated that right-brain processes such as art, sculpture, dreamwork, and writing poetry or journals were keys to holding one's center when assaulted by the emerging unconscious material. These practices encourage the emergence of a symbol that contains the possibility of transformation, amplify the capacity to witness one's own process and objectify some of the elements of it, allow a more free flow of material that might otherwise stay blocked, and may even develop new neural pathways in the brain. The flood of creative activity sometimes associated with Kundalini may be as much a spontaneous and unconscious survival and growth mechanism as a grand flowering of genius.

The Knots & the Selves

Jung's model of individuation presents a concept of self that is broad enough to include the entire spectrum of collective experiences. It promotes encounter with spirit and acknowledgment of the numinous aspects of human existence. But if we move on to the nature of the Kundalini experience, we must consider the eastern idea that self is established in the mind-body complex only until Self-realization occurs, which then establishes it as consciousness, bliss and union with cosmic consciousness. One who is thus aware knows that Self abides in all beings and all beings in oneself. He or she sees one Self underlying all of creation and all of life as nothing but a projection of that greater Self.

Clearly we are now moving from identification with personal self to identification with collective Self, a situation Jung warns against. Perhaps this is the crux of the psychological dynamics of Kundalini awakening. The pain and upheavals of Kundalini awakening are similar to those of individuation, where the former persona and false selves are abdicating their role in favor of the unification of personality around the deeper self. A similar process occurs during the Kundalini experience, accompanied by an intense disruption of energy and a movement of the psyche to reject identification with the very body, mind and emotions we have previously claimed as our own. The wholeness of our self is disintegrating in order to allow us to experience Wholeness -- the primal and eternal wholeness of the universal Self. Now we are grappling with an awareness that claims our very existence is only a play of energies contracted within an illusionary space and time.

As indicated earlier, yogic literature refers to three granthis or knots in the subtle body system, which link physical, subtle and causal bodies and carry especially intense charges of energy. These are identified as the knot of Brahma, the knot of Vishnu, and the knot of Rudra or Shiva. usually associated with muladhara, anahata and ajna chakras, respectively. Tantric gurus warn that if psychic energy is forced through these knots before a practitioner is adequately prepared, physical and nervous system disorders will erupt. Psychic blockages called lingas are associated with each knot. Ajit Mookerjee wrote: "To clear the Brahma knot is to get established in totality; to clear the Vishnu knot, to perceive the existence of a universal life-principle; to clear the Rudra knot, to attain the non-dual state, realization of oneness, the universal joy."[35] The breaking of these three knots are major steps achieved in detaching the mind from illusionary existence and making Self-realization possible.

These three stages appear to correspond to stages of change in consciousness. It is possible that the psychic center of an individual who has not opened the Brahma knot corresponds to what psychologists identify as the "false self" or the unreal self. It is locked into survival, sexual and power drives -- preoccupied with appearances, superficial accomplishments, immediate pleasures or pains, defensive positions and other lower chakra energies. People with narcissistic or borderline personality disorders often model this level of psychological functioning, which is transformed when they unveil and activate the real self. It then becomes possible for them to live authentically and creatively, using latent potentials, and engaging in genuine relationship. (In fact, most people can slip back and forth between these two kinds of self-identifications at any moment, depending on the pressures they are dealing with.)

The psychic center after the Brahma knot is pierced might then correspond to what psychotherapists identify as the "real" self, the authentic or the actualized self. Those who are centered and directed from a sense of their "real" self live with congruence and well-being. They have self-awareness, flexibility, and creativity in solving problems. They are fully engaging energies of the subtle body, which carry the mental, emotional and sensate activities of the individual. As these energies come into balance throughout the chakras people become "individuated", which would imply that in addition to functioning well in the world, there are glimpses of the higher Self. Symbolic material may emerge through which they become aware of a greater reality or universal truths. Psychologies of the self link inevitably to the integration of subtle-body material for this is the substance of our psychic life which must be activated for our personal wholeness to occur. The gross body is only the container for the life; the subtle body animates and energizes it with memories, emotions, thoughts, patterns, and possibilities. Piercing the knot of Brahma brings us into our full potential as human beings, establishing us in our totality.

If the Vishnu knot is pierced, the psyche becomes attuned to the principles of existence and begins to deal with the Self as it is known in yoga. This Self has access to the psychic, visual and archetypal worlds and yet transcends them. The Kundalini experience, fully lived through, includes the process of integrating causal body awareness, of recognizing existence beyond the personalized patterns of subtle body. This is comparable to living in the Tao in the Chinese tradition, not the ego living there but becoming a clear presence with non-attached awareness. This transition is almost too much for the personality to bear, implying as it does a giving up of all justification for the existence of the real self, the right to be "me", an individual or unique being, in control of my environment. To identify with this deeper or primary "Self" is to release the delusion of control and surrender to a higher stream of energy and consciousness which guides and motivates our life, living beyond the boundaries of individualized perception.

When this kind of awareness emerges, pressures are forced on consciousness to complete the task of individuating or to transcend the subtle body samskaras (inherent conditions and tendencies) still existing. Those who are prepared to move on into higher levels of causal experience will live no longer from an individual sense but from a sense of universal consciousness, an acting out for the good of others whatever collective needs are felt in the unique connection an individual has through the deeper Self. Awakened souls such as Aurobindo, Ramakrishna, Yogananda, Krishnamurti, Anandamayi Ma and others are moved to act, as if by a force outside of themselves, to create a movement in universal consciousness, such as all great spiritual masters have done. This is a non-dual state called Rudra.

Clearly Jesus was not acting out of his experience of individuation, but from a much more profound place of awareness. The problem for the ego in following such a model is that such an action can never be chosen, or led by the ego. If it is attempted it will always be distorted. Therefore just because someone tries to model their lives after a spiritual leader or saint does not mean they have achieved non-dualism, and in fact such modeling often leads to delusion and inflation. It is only a lengthy process of awakening and transformation of one's personal self that allows such developments, all in its own timing. The majority of those who awaken Kundalini are not going to engage this process and transcend the ego at the level required to make a complete transition to this kind of consciousness. That would undoubtedly be the piercing of the third granthi or knot. But perhaps it is the psychic energy enticing them in this direction that cause such psychological havoc.

Therapists can deal with incompletion in individuation and help clients to find bridges between aspects of the causal world with its powerful psychic, visionary and numinous contents and the ordinary reality in which we all must live. People who have broken this third granthi or knot, and live with a deeper knowledge as the center of their psyche would have no interest in or need of therapy.

If we look at the development of consciousness through this three-tiered pattern of the granthis or knots, we can hypothesize that people with psychotic or personality disorders who have religious delusions have come in contact somehow (possibly because of very weak ego boundaries or natural psychic potentials) with this third level, the causal body, and may be charged with its considerable energy and vision. This becomes distorted and dangerous because there is no real self to moderate self-discipline, goal-setting, relatedness, creative activity -- all the tasks which the real self must do to establish a successful integration of subtle body energies in the world. This stage of development simply must occur in some way. Otherwise it is akin to a primitive consciousness being charged with power it cannot distribute or modulate, and becoming identified with universal forces beyond any capacity to digest them.

Perhaps to a degree some of those who reported intense spiritual openings on LSD experienced a similar process. Since they had neither context not spiritual practice to hold the ego in check, and little individuation to sustain such processes, they could only become infatuated with the drug itself, follow it as if it were a Messiah, and plunge into experiences over and over again which had no hope of assimilation. Often their lives and their goals changed because their perspective was altered, but they had no hope of becoming enlightened on the drug.

I do not believe Kundalini awakening causes psychosis, but it presents material from the collective and the numinous world so intensely that a stable psychic structure is needed to hold it (a fact which is also true of the LSD experience). Almost all of the work of psychotherapists with Kundalini clients is to help them achieve such a structure, while accepting and supporting the new awareness that has emerged. A larger psychic container is needed. Tools that are useful to this end are found in psychologies that recognize the unifying capacities of the personal self and the transcendent energies of the deeper Self, such as Jungian analysis and Psychosynthesis. Yogic or tantric perspectives are supportive because they provide a cosmological perspective wide enough to encompass the multi-dimensional realities of the Self.

Visions & Voices

Numerous visions and images may accompany the Kundalini process, many of which were described in an earlier chapter of this book. None of them are indicative of psychosis. Yogis and tantric Buddhists utilize these images extensively, and a considerable yogic and tantric iconography has developed around the various chakras, including the symbols of the elements, the gods and goddesses, and the frightening images of demons and destruction that appear during meditative states. In tantra these are real forces and powers which the psyche must encounter and integrate as part of the spiritual path.

Some of the images common in yoga and in the art and dreams of subjects in the Kundalini process have been interpreted by Jung in relationship to the individuation process. Jung saw them as links with the collective unconscious, often reflecting archetypes. This correlation does not mean that individuation and Kundalini awakening are identical experiences, only that the psychic reaction to intensive change is accompanied by similar images of dying and rebirth.

In early stages of spiritual awakening visions or symbolic images might be considered figments of imagination, or representations of the changes one is undergoing psychically. In later stages, however, much of the biographical material suggests that one may actually be encountering guidance or learning lessons from masters on another plane of consciousness.

Giving medication to control such visions may be either useless or dangerous. Providing a loving, supportive atmosphere where the images can be safely shared allows more integration, and eventually this stage of the process will end, for the ultimate religious experience is not about visions, but is beyond form. Visions are frequently produced, however, as a link between ordinary reality and supraordinary consciousness. Whether the mind is projecting them, or entities from other dimensions providing them, one is best advised to pay attention but avoid attachment; simply observe and release the experience.

Visions may also show clearly the energies emerging as a particular chakra awakens and provide insight into the physical, emotional or psychic events that accompany this movement. It is possible that physical symptoms, imagery and emotional difficulties coalesce around particular chakras as each encounters the powers of the Kundalini energy, and that looking at the material provided by the unconscious through vision could help one to integrate and understand more clearly what is happening. This is a very unexamined concept, since the intellect is not used in the yogic tradition to analyze the numinous content of spiritual experiences. But when one is trying to integrate western conditioning and mentality with eastern experience, these bridges may be reassuring and lead ultimately to some understanding of the interrelationship between psyche and spiritual experience.

On the other hand the evidence of my subjects suggests that if visions do occur this stage passes quickly, and one may be best advised to simply observe and let it pass, rather than psychoanalyze it. Aurobindo advised against talking about experiences, saying that sharing weakened them and brought down the consciousness; but it seems from the case histories in the literature that having at least one understanding confidant is nurturing to this process. Muktananda was not in favor of concealing spiritual experiences, and encouraged setting up sharing sessions for Westerners in his ashram. He believed this guided and encouraged students and heightened their experiences.

The psychotherapist who is seeking a way to integrate the visual experiences of a Kundalini client can draw on Jungian and yogic resources for interpretation, including the Tibetan Book of the Dead, a classical description of the imagery that accompanies death and rebirth. There seems to be a dramatic variation among individuals in the production of such phenomena and the usefulness of it in the spiritual process. Visions are much less significant in earlier stages of spiritual development, and are reported by some yogis to be a hindrance and distraction on the path, yet they had profound impact in later stages for Caitanya who became lost in his visions of Krishna, for Kennett Roshi who assimilated her third kensho through visionary experiences, for Muktananda, Da Free John, Krishnamurti, and most of the other subjects of this book. The proper relationship to such profound visions is to bear a humble witnessing to them rather than to psychoanalyze them. The mind can do nothing to improve on the experience of the numinous, and unfortunately tends to reduce it.

However, analytical psychology demonstrates the value to the psyche of the transforming symbol. Jung wrote that this symbol helps to heal the neurosis which is at the root of the dissociation of the personality.

> The consciousness goes to the right and the unconscious to the left. As opposites never unite at their own level....a subordinate "third" is always required in which the two parts can come together, and since the symbol derives as much from the conscious as the unconscious, it is able to unite them both, reconciling their conceptional polarity through its numinosity.[36]

This comment echoes the yogic image of ida, pingala and sushumna nadis, experienced as a vivid visual image in B. S. Goel's case. The blue pearl described by Muktananda may initiate a similar resolution of opposites, as did the vision of purusha and prakriti in Chris's case. There was not a significant use of symbolic imagery in the majority of cases I studied; however, I wonder if the presence of the inner guru, which occurred frequently, sometimes serves this function. The appearance of gurus or spiritual beings, such as Mary or Jesus, may serve the function of an integrative numinous image for many on spiritual paths. Reactivating a spontaneous numinous image and bringing it into consciousness deliberately could be useful in this process, helping people to achieve integration, in ways similar to the individuation process.

Hearing voices, or being aware of a guiding presence and receiving information from it, are also experiences commonly reported in the stories. Usually the voice contains a simple message such as "Call to commitment", or "Peace be with you" or offers instructions. Sometimes people are directed by voices to write autobiographies or to explore certain aspects of their lives. The voices of the Kundalini process are usually soothing, directive, and healing and these distinguish them significantly from the haunting voices of disassociative psychic elements that disturb psychotic people. The sounds and music heard in this process are also indicative of profound connections with supraconscious vibrations, as discussed in some detail in an earlier chapter. The most useful approach to such opportunities is to witness them and receive them as guidance (without abandoning rational discrimination) for personal life, without inflation and without making assumptions regarding their truth for everyone else.

By respecting the inner voice one can learn to tune into a deep inner awareness, a sense of the Self with its wise perspective regarding one's life and actions, which is reassuring and psychologically strengthening throughout this process. This voice becomes the center of trust and foundation for one's life. It will never impose the shoulds and sanctions of society, nor encourage any destructive impulses, and should these occur they indicate the emerging of a sub-personality, a yet unredeemed psychic fragment that must be dealt with. Psychotherapists can help the Kundalini client acknowledge the true voice of the Self, and turn to it like a beacon in the night.

Remembering & Reliving Past Lives

Several of the stories of Kundalini awakening included a unique kind of visionary process, the spontaneous remembering of past lives. This also happens to people who are not engaged in spiritual processes, as evidenced by many volumes written on the subject, and memories can apparently be induced through hypnosis and other relaxation techniques. Sometimes the perceived remembering of a past life provides a fresh perspective on ingrained personality patterns, explains difficulties and allows completions that need to occur in the psyche or personal life, or sets the tone for a new movement.

Although some people believe in past lives as a literal, sequential occurrence, we might hypothesize also that they come to us allegorically, or genetically, or from the collective unconscious so that we have access to a past experience or archetypal pattern lived through by someone else, activated to assist us at a particular time. Such memories tend to feel more real subjectively than dreams or fantasies, as emotions and body sensations are felt as if they are actually being relived, even if one has never had such experiences in the present life.

Kennett Roshi recommends a highly structured process for assisting people in cleansing the karmic residue from past lives, under the guidance of a Buddhist priest and with the assistance of loving friends who use mudras.

The first hours in the enlightenment of Buddha reportedly involved the remembering of past lives, showing him the cause of suffering as attachment, the truth of impermanence and suffering ,and the reasons for his own birth, old age, disease and death. Understanding past lives is not a prerequisite for enlightenment, but it is "the natural way in which the Buddhas teach the trainee the cause of suffering and how to avoid the clouding of his realization which would result from repeating the same mistakes that started the chain of suffering long ago."[37] Karmic memories also tend to deepen compassion and empathy.

In addition to hearing of these stories from those in Kundalini processes, I have seen them emerge frequently during breathwork sessions and acupressure treatments. They are easily elicited through deep altered-state experiences. Kennett believes the most remote of past-life memories often show the cause of suffering in its most powerful and subtle forms, and indicate an attachment one is likely to repeat in this life unless one pursues meditation and other spiritual training. Memories of past lives can come forth to help one convert tendencies of the present life, especially if more than one past life is remembered within several months. Finding the common connection and taking the message to heart is a major step forward in religious training.

Bhai Sahib, Irina Tweedie's guru, also referred to past-life memories in his advice to her, saying that fearful images she experienced were relieving past-life karma, and that horrible dreams sometimes act out the karma of past lives so that one does not have to do so consciously.[38]

I have personally found past-life regression to be a way of deepening my understanding of my own spiritual process and experiences, especially recalling of past lives which were spiritually oriented, and in which Kundalini energy was active. These regressions provided insight into my personal process and gave me an inner sense of where my psyche is going in its spiritual work in this life. I found that I could access a state of consciousness I had not yet known in this life, which provided an imprint or a "felt sense" of myself to be drawn on when needed. This can be a useful support as one begins to integrate the awakening process, let go of old identifications, and look toward a new future with a changed world perspective.

CHAPTER NINE

AFTER AWAKENING: OX-HERDING IN THE WEST

This book is a tapestry woven from the threads of many teachings, reflecting the dramas and the deepest insights of lives spent in meditation and surrendering to the possibility of numinous experience. I have attempted to include the flavor of the whole of it, as nearly as I could discover during six years of research. Yet this is only a foundation, and a sparse one at that, for the mystery of Kundalini bridges science and mysticism, ancient history and modern experiences, bringing up questions about what is human and what is divine. We are using the limited constructs of the left-brain to place interpretations on realms it is incapable of knowing. I recognize that this left-brain dimension of my mind would like to be reductionist and provide simple answers to clarify the mystery and uncertainty in this process. The right-brained part of me would paradoxically design a grand poetic monument in hopes people could grasp intuitively what cannot be said in language alone.

One question I have pondered often in this process is "What is the difference, if any, between great saints such as Ramakrishna or Yogananda and those who have more modest spiritual paths such as the subjects of this book?" Is it presumptuous to lump the experiences of therapists and nurses, housewives and businessmen, students and physicians, with those of people who achieved significant status as models of enlightenment and peace? My tentative conclusion is that they are all part of a continuum. Just as intelligence has a range within which it can be measured, so does consciousness follow a range, and our great saints are at the higher edge of the scale.

Gopi Krishna attributed the capacity of thought to the psychic energy supplied by nerves which flow to the brain. He believed that once Kundalini is awakened, metabolic body processes are accelerated and the entire nervous system produces a radiation that pours into the brain, causing it to evolve like "an embryo in the womb". Ultimately this transforms consciousness and a "superior type of mind is born". Such development can only occur through Kundalini awakening, according to Krishna. In fact, he called Kundalini the energy responsible for all remarkable and inexplicable phenomena that has ever been noted in human experience ranging from insanity to psychic and artistic gifts to genius.

The equation of Kundalini and genius raises pressing questions for those who study this phenomena. Can genius be "created" by encouraging spiritual practices? Have all who demonstrated genius experienced Kundalini? Do such questions promote elitism and cause unhealthy ego tendencies?

Krishna felt the future of the planet depended on the ability of science to understand this fundamental energy and to apply it in ways that would stimulate expanded consciousness, creativity and genius, which could be applied to solving social and ecological problems. This indeed may be the evolutionary direction of this process, but in terms of the ego a certain risk is imposed when great accomplishments are seen as the consequence of spiritual awareness. Such striving can perpetuate the dualistic intellectual divisions so frequently encouraged by the rationalistic mind. It makes of spiritual awakening an achievement, an ambition and a grave responsibility. There are advantages to this viewpoint as it may attract persons with strong will and intentionality to the spiritual quest, but I have observed that when striving for perfection, accomplishment and superiority the egoic mind can be greatly inhibited in achieving spiritual progress: traditionally seekers are expected to develop modesty, humility and egoic surrender.

Many enlightened saints achieved their goal by devotion and because of intense love of the divine. Such focus causes them to withdrew their minds from worldly achievements. The ultimate development of spiritual awakening is the experience of Self, or cosmic consciousness, but the final stages of experiencing this require complete detachment from any desires or expectations. Great masters have traditionally sought liberation from human concerns, not genius.

I prefer to view Kundalini awakening not as an accomplishment but as an opening, a development of conscious spirit, mind and body, which deepens one's understanding and appreciation of the wonders of existence, and leads the psyche toward peaceful coexistence with the natural cycles of living and dying. I expect it creates an expansion of right-brained development, initiating new pathways and patterns through which emerge enhanced creativity, vision, spontaneity and intuitive awareness. It also allows consciousness to tap more fully into subtle and causal body realms and beyond. Its' ultimate climax pushes consciousness into cosmic awareness and stabilized bliss. Such openings have evidently always existed and have always been possible in humans, at least through recorded history.

We have become so spiritually bereft as a culture that we rely on soap-opera ministers with billion-dollar empires to lecture us on morality, we no longer expect to find genuine spirituality in the pulpit nor in religious institutions, and we are quick to discredit and discourage any overt evidence of a spiritual calling among our friends and associates. Culturally there is a need to reframe our concept of what it means to be a spiritual person, accepting it as a natural response, a calling in our deeper selves, which pulls us into a harmonious relationship with our deepest potential and with the larger community of the planet. At the same time, spiritual experiences bring us into direct contact with dimensions of consciousness beyond linear thinking and limited belief systems, expanding understanding beyond those parameters of dogma, ritual and fear-inducing theories that have crippled the capacity of modern religion to touch the soul.

A genuine spiritual encounter has the potential to shatter the foundations of ego boundaries from within, and plunge us into a vast perspective -- for some, a magnificent and joyous event. It helps us recognize our contraction and separation. We sense our collective process guided by the flow of a limitless universe when we slip out of the ego perspective and experience universal creative energy. We release "I" and discover the "not-I" that contains us.

Such glimpses, while they change our perspective profoundly, do not generally make us knowledgeable of everything and able to read everyone's mind, nor do they cure personality problems nor obliterate the necessity for thoughtfulness and will. These are fanciful delusions and projections the ego makes on those who are spiritually awake. Awakening nurtures the capacity for love in some, but seems to contain others in a cocoon of detached peacefulness. It seems to pass over many lives, leaving a mark in the way a spring rain nourishes the crops and clears the air. In others it is a maelstrom bringing major life changes, and dangerous physical and emotional confrontations. Not everyone who experiences Her energy and power will become a teacher of the caliber of Krishnamurti, or a crazy wisdom teacher the likes of Da Free John, or a God-intoxicated saint like Ramakrishna.

As in every other aspect of life, each of us brings a different character, personality, and potential into every moment of experience and each responds in unique ways. Most of those who awaken this connection with the ecstatic inner Self will return to being who they were, perhaps doing their lives with more contentment or a gentler perspective, perhaps more involved and committed in service to others, perhaps more energized and expressive, perhaps writing poetry, teaching, loving unconditionally. Hopefully, some will eventually eradicate ego tendencies, live more consistently in higher states of awareness and expand their minds to the extent they can make significant contributions to society.

Archetypes of the Spiritual Life

Hindu models of enlightenment have traditionally reflected two major archetypal responses: that of the guru, and that of the hermit. Both are beyond the attachments of life, the first being essential to other souls as a teacher, the other enjoying the play of forces without needing to use personality in daily life. A few have demonstrated a life of bhakti, devotion to the divine, which inspires others to faith and practice. Christian saints have often been social activists, although there are many hermits and bhaktis in the tradition. The Buddhist path, acknowledging that one simply returns to chop wood and cut water, suggests that people generally do return to their lives and simply try to live them a little bit better, working for the good of others. The Bodhisattva vow is to reincarnate over and over only to serve others, until every soul is liberated. The idea of service to humanity has always permeated spiritual literature of every persuasion.

As Westerners pursue spiritual processes and develop the capacity to express new dimensions of their humanity, a wider range of archetypes may become available to us. We may find new ways to live -- more creative, more interactive, more respectful of the environment. We may find ways to contain our humanness and our godliness without being arrogant about either, and therefore respecting the same equally in everyone else. We may learn to experience living more as a game and a passion and as multiple interconnections and patterns of light and dark. We may find ways to relieve the heavy, oppressive and intense seriousness of day-to day living, the fierce competition, and the economic struggles that so permeate all strata of society. Taking responsibility may be less burdensome. We may lose our fear of dying and thereby intensify our response to living.

We can observe historically that change is always and in every moment the nature and pattern of existence. Every civilization, every epoch, every belief system, every day eventually passes to another while the ego desperately struggles to keep things the same, to hold back the natural processes of living and dying. The changes occurring now in terms of spiritual expansion in the West are not as radically new as they seem at first glance. They are newly stimulated but deeply encoded possibilities, which can now be integrated by a more scientifically developed culture. Every mind that is open to them helps to create the foundation for whatever changes are meant to emerge in the next hundreds of years of this planet. It is encouraging to see public polls which indicate that 4.5 million Americans have tried meditation. In time they may bring more light to the planet.

However we should not be so naive as to believe spiritual awakening brings only light. It is clear from the conditions described during Kundalini awakening that as light increases an invariable counterbalance arises. It does not appear to be in the nature of this species to live in a world that is only light, only peace; darkness and disturbance coexist as soon as dualism is acknowledged. The shadow is well known in philosophy and psychology, and appears consistently in our dreams. Conflict emerges as soon as human will is put into motion, for as each of us attempts to have our own way, expand our territory, or enforce our particular spiritual or political beliefs we are forced up against the will of others, caught up again in the play of opposites that is part of a dynamic existence. Therefore what individuals can seek, and the planet may hope for in time, is not perfection, but sanity, wholeness and balance, as each individual plays a role in harmony with the deepest Self, and is capable of connecting at least momentarily with inner peace, compassion, unitive consciousness and bliss.

Great spiritual teachers are not all "purely" good and "perfect" beings, but perhaps are perfectly disciplined, not in a harsh and punitive style, but simply capable of choosing a communal good over and above a personal desire, having annihilated to a great extent the personal desires that drive the average soul to distraction. It is not likely that human beings will rapidly develop this capacity to release personal desire -- it is unrealistic to anticipate and expect it. If one considers the teaching of yogic scriptures, without desires there would be no one choosing to be birthed on the planet at all. From a psychological perspective it is dangerous to experience dispassion prematurely, and can lead to emotional sterility, existential angst and despair unless there is a corresponding depth of connection with the deeper Self.

The majority of those who awaken Kundalini will not choose to annihilate their egos, but will follow a path more akin to individuation, creating a way in their lives to integrate insight, harmony and productivity into their various lifestyles. Interjecting greater depth, ecological awareness and compassion into their environments, they may teach, serve or play in more light-hearted and nurturing patterns than were available to them before. Their intelligence and creativity may expand. They may make it possible to develop a genuine understanding of the spiritual potential of humanity, and encourage this recognition in a culture that has been sadly blinded to it. Hopefully they will discover ways of acknowledging the shadow without allowing it to unconsciously damage or destroy others. This is the most likely model in the West for the integration of Kundalini experiences.

Kundalini is the pure energy and consciousness of life force, part of the infinite consciousness that creates all form and extends beyond the limits of our mental concept of time and space. Whether it awakens by accident or design it has a potential to connect us directly with rich experiences and wisdom, if we are ready to open ourselves to it. An initial satori or samadhi experience appears to be just the opening, a powerful flash of seeing or merging into bliss or awareness that can certainly change entirely our view of human life, our behavior, our capacity to love. But this is only the slightest crack into what is available to us. There appears to be endless potential for extension and expression in the spiritual life, just as there are seemingly endless life styles, patterns and personalities to be expressed on the planet by human beings over the millions of years allotted the human species.

Kundalini is fundamentally associated with the spiritualizing of body and mind, expanding the capacity of the human to experience and hold the infinite. It is a slow development, as all evolutionary changes are slow. It is often painful both physically and psychologically as it involves both dissolution of blocks to expansion and the giving up of identity, beliefs, and attachments. This is what the destructive aspect of the Hindu goddess Kali represents, the letting go and surrendering of ego identity as we know it. The pain of this is further exacerbated when one's experience is misunderstood, rejected or advised against by peers. It is a transformation difficult to navigate successfully without understanding, requiring the willingness to surrender heart and mind to a higher source, and traditionally the guru has acted as navigator.

Facing Spiritual Confrontation

This process confronts our view of reality at its deepest core. The life force erupts with the intensity of an earthquake, and the psyche is left to shift through the rubble. Those who have opened accidentally into an experience they are not ready to fully embrace may seek help to cool it down, to distance themselves from the trauma. To some extent this may be possible through working with emotional issues and blocks, eating balanced meals, becoming intellectually or emotionally involved in secular goals and interests, and forgoing meditation and all other forms of altered-state practices. I have spoken with people who seemed to have temporary openings that abated after some time because of their preöccupation with other matters, and lack of sustained interest in spiritual practices. I suspect that for those people who have genuine Kundalini openings rather than pranic releases or stress reactions that resemble Kundalini, there would be great difficulty in inhibiting the symptoms, or they might disappear temporarily but reopen easily at a later time.

If you are reading this from the perspective of a healer or a transpersonal therapist, your task is to facilitate and support the direction of the soul. If a client is genuinely seeking to cooperate with the opening, many processes can be used to facilitate the breaking down of blocks, and to reach the capacity to open and surrender to the natural direction of this force itself. One can learn to manage and direct the energy. Clients must learn to differentiate clearly between inner-world experience and the outer consciousness. This separation is essential if one is to avoid mental problems or inflation. But there is a transformation of outer consciousness occurring nonetheless, as perceptions, attitudes, the capacity to witness, and the range of compassion and clarity grow.

In addition, the Kundalini experience works on all the impurities in the personality, forcing one to confront and release negative patterns and personality traits. It draws one more toward introversion and introspection, stimulates the attraction to spiritual practices, and causes one to see the unity more than the divisiveness of life. If one learns to flow with this energy, respect it, and cooperate with the process it will slowly lead one toward an integrated and lasting transformation of consciousness and personality. The outward symptoms and difficulties will ultimately fall away and the energy be active at a more subtle level, leading one into deeper states of light, bliss and wisdom while meditating, or practicing awareness in day to day life.

It would seem, if this is possible, that everyone would seek it. But the problem is that the spiritual life is painful, slow and difficult in the earlier stages, the ego is asked to abandon itself, and it feels as if survival is at stake. Discipline and structure is demanded. One clearly sees that all the ordinary joys of life are diminished, and it is hard to believe something better could arise from the ashes. At any point on the journey we can abandon hope, or become side-tracked by the attraction of a new diversion, an unfinished instinct or old karmic business.

I propose that there are levels of evolution in this process, and the majority of them are correlated with an intensified prana in the body or the opening of various chakras, and of the three knots or granthis. These openings generally occur as one progresses on a spiritual path, addresses resistance and psychological issues, or practices yogic or tantric techniques and other meditations, but they may occur spontaneously because of some kind of psychological and physical readiness that is not apparent to outside observers. An awakened teacher can stimulate and/or monitor the process. But it is clear from the cases presented that one does not have to be on a classical spiritual path in order to engage this experience.

Even in psychoanalysis one experiences major energetic and emotional changes as complexes are addressed and resolved, symbols are integrated, and repressed emotions are released. Numinous experiences such as visions, lucid dreams, synchronistic events, waves of peace and love, and encounters with the Self may emerge. Spiritual practices, particularly meditation, bring similar psychic evolution and tear down repressive egoic structures. Often people experience a heightening of pranic energy long before they experience Kundalini awakening.

It is also important to avoid equating Kundalini experiences with enlightenment, even if the energy itself is the life force of universal consciousness, as described by the yogis. The literature, and my experience with subjects, suggest to me that the phenomena associated with Kundalini is a preliminary stage or transition through which the body and psyche prepare over years for a deeper and deeper experience of energy and awareness.

It appears that "enlightenment" is rarely a single, final and complete encounter with the numinous, but that we experience glimpses and intimations and consciousness in varying degrees of intensity as we are able to contain and integrate them, long before we approach liberation. Even the smallest encounter can completely redirect our life, and bring some satisfaction to the thirsty soul. We enter through a door and grasp an entirely new reality. But we live in an ever-expanding and eternal universe and it is Self-limiting to make assumptions that we understand it all.

One of the significant facts of this research is that it was relatively easy to locate ten subjects who have had intense and life-transforming experiences with Kundalini energy, although none of them were practicing yogis or monks in the traditional sense. During the original research I met at least forty others who also fit the criteria but for various reasons were not included in this book. Since its publication I have interviewed several hundred others. Thousands a year contact the Spiritual Emergence Network (SEN), an international referral source which specializes in helping people find help during a spiritual crisis, including Kundalini experiences.[1] In 1990 I helped to found another organization, the international Kundalini Research Network, to encourage research and clinical understanding of this process. Members are creating a data bank of hundreds of cases for further research, as well as supporting other research projects. KRN publishes a newsletter and holds annual symposiums.[2]

It is apparent that a number of people in western cultures are finding paths to spiritual awakening not commonly known or supported by western spiritual traditions. This suggests that the rigors of monastic life, celibacy and disciplined spiritual practices are not essential to awakening, although they may be helpful, and that people living more ordinary lives can have mystical experiences previously ascribed only to saints. It is important to bring this experience into the realm of ordinary life, so that people who aspire to mystic experience will be encouraged to follow this natural impulse of the psyche, instead of believing that only extraordinary and saintly people (so defined by the tenets of some specific church hierarchy) are capable of it. Inevitably this will bring more genuine spirituality into the culture.

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[1] The Spiritual Emergence Network was founded by Dr. Stanislav and Christina Grof at Esalen Institute in 1980. In 1990 it became an independent non-profit organization, located in Santa Cruz, CA. They can be called for referral information at (408) 426-0902.

2 Membership information can be obtained from Dale Pond, R.R. 5, Flesherton, Canada NOC 1EO (519) 924-2681.

Collective Awakening

Many mystics and teachers suggest that the increased reports of Kundalini awakening at this time in history suggest a larger purpose at work, a universal planetary movement.. The earth appears to be trembling in the foreboding presence of major upheavals as we approach the 21st century. There are dire predictions of cataclysmic environmental changes, along with the ever-present annihilating threat of nuclear war and the continual pressures of war, oppression, starvation, crime and economic collapse in every sector of the hemisphere. We have watched with astonishment the collapse of Communism and the emergence of freedom in eastern Europe. This is a radical upheaval, to a remarkable extent nonviolent, coming from the core of millions of people who have long felt trapped in an unresponsive political system. For decades the possibility of such enormous shifts in ideology was inconceivable. That this kind of shift can occur so rapidly offers hope for all of the stuck places on the planet -- ideologies that hold many in the throes of poverty, starvation, guerrilla wars, and criminal activities.

Perhaps such spontaneous movements, impacting the entire world, are part of the universal aspect of Kundalini. Certainly great confusion and chaos will reign for some years as the countries of Eastern Europe struggle to create a new economic and political system, and the entire continent moves to form the United States of Europe. The possibilities in Europe have far surpassed any previous predictions, and no one can say what will eventually emerge. Even more desperate upheavals are underway in Africa, Burma, Haiti and hundreds of other countries at this time.

Not only politically, but environmentally, monumental and inconceivable adaptations may lie in our immediate future. At every level we are poisoning the environment, from the ocean to the ozone layer to storage within the earth of deadly gases. Major earthquakes, shifting of the earth plates, and weather changes that promote drought are only a few of the predicted disasters psychics say may herald the "New Age". If these predictions should ever come to pass human life will only continue because of human beings with strong characters, flexibility, creativity, cooperative attitudes, inner resources, values which promote communal survival above individual acquisition, and the inner strength that is nourished by engaging that which is divine in us. Spiritual communities are emerging around the globe at this time, and individuals in many unlikely places are having Shamanic visions, Kundalini awakenings, psychic intuitions and a passion for teaching what they know to others. Slowly the vision of what it means to be human and divine is changing, merging, awakening, and teaching us more about our capacities and potentialities.

Perhaps the individuals engaging in the tumultuous event of spiritual awakening are prototypes for what the planetary consciousness must ultimately face:

-- purification of the unconscious patterns that allow us to destroy, abuse and violate one another;

-- awareness there is one humanity and one planet with one set of resources we all share that could only be connected to one spiritual source;

-- reawakening of our capacity to connect psychically and experientially with that source and experience bliss and joy and wisdom directly;

-- and willingness to live in moderation and nurture our planet in healthy ways which sustain all life.

There are numerous patterns with which to identify the human microcosm with the planetary macrocosm, for universally our thought forms as a species create the quality of life on this fragile sphere hurtling through space, sustained by the same pranic sources on which we all depend.

Kundalini awakening is awakening into awareness of this energy which can be used to heal, transform, energize and evolve higher levels of consciousness. Once we are fully alive as a spiritual species we will know how to sustain change and develop from within us a quality of life that can cooperate with the forces of nature to nurture our planet for future generations. We do not yet know what is possible and can only play with imagination to visualize a healthier and saner planet, peopled by a wise and loving species in touch with the natural ecstasy of the inner being. Such changes are unlikely to be the consequence of following one great teacher, many of whom we have known already. They will result when many individuals are willing to turn their egos inside-out and plunge deeply into the more firmly rooted core of the Self, in order to activate the fundamental values of human existence. This is the long-term potential of such awakenings, whether they occur after great disciplined effort, or spontaneously. They teach of the possibilities inherent in transformational change which we need to understand in order to move to the next stage of planetary development.

This does not mean that all who have awakened Kundalini energies are already so wise. Universal energy/consciousness has always been neutral, has the capacity to be used for better or worse purposes by an individual who does not have the strength to go completely through the purifying process it offers. There are always forces in human consciousness that tempt us with power, greed, envy, sloth and all the seven deadly sins. These "sins" are human failings, our shadows, which keep us in ignorance because we cannot go all the way through this process as long as we actively focus our attention on them. And everyone falls, over and over. At this stage of development it is prudent to acknowledge with compassion and love who we are, where we are weak, where we can become stronger.

As we push toward awakening, and try to engage in activities that sustain and deepen it, we may possibly become more than we were. When we break into the ecstasy of pure awareness, at those moments we cannot be anything else but light, but how impossible it seems to live there all the time, and how natural to fall back into our ordinary imperfections. Never underestimate the difficulties of such a process -- for individuals, for the planet. The lessons are all around us. It is in the Christianity that became the Inquisition, in the Islam that killed infidels, in the failed guru who betrayed his followers, in governments ruled by special interests, in corruption that follows in the footsteps of good intentions. No matter how noble our ideals and purposes, we slide repeatedly into destruction and inhumane choices, in order to protect our position, our desires, our points of view. Spiritual awakening does not prevent this, at least not in the early stages with which we are primarily involved here: it simply gives us an added incentive to transform those renegade elements of our psyches, which keep us from being in the peace and ecstasy that is hidden inside our deepest core.

The more I open myself to observe the true condition of the planet, the depth of the pain that is the norm for much of the human species, and the portents for the future, the less surprised I am at the growing number of individuals who are "awakening", and going through ordeals much like ancient initiations which shift their consciousness. Perhaps all of us need this experience, and need it quickly. Or perhaps the earth is being seeded for something to come in the distant future, and we are only being asked to experiment and to study spiritual processes at this moment in time. Whatever the purpose, we cannot afford to allow psychology, philosophy, science or religion to ignore or reject these processes. We need to develop tolerance, respect, understanding and support for souls who are pioneering these uncharted territories. We are all learning together, we share a common destiny, and we are winding hand-in-hand through the labyrinthine energy fields that will ultimately lead us into the sacred light and purpose of the human soul.

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Appendix 1

KUNDALINI ENERGY MEDITATION

DYAYET PARAM AMBIKAM
SINDURARUNVIGRHAM
TRINAYANAM
MANIKYAMOULISPHURAT TARANAYAKASEKHARAM
SMITAMUKHIM
APINAVAKSORUHAM
PANIBHAM MANIRATNAPURNACASAKAM RAKTOPALAM
BIBHRATIM SOUMYAM
RATNAGHATASTHA SAVYA CARANAM
DYAYET PARAM AMBIKAM

MEDITATE ON THE ABSOLUTE MOTHER
WHOSE BODY IS RED IN COLOR
(WHOSE FORM IS ENERGY ITSELF)
WHO HAS THREE EYES
(WHO LOOKS AFTER HER CHILDREN WITH THREE EYES: ONE FOR EACH WORLD)
WHOSE HEAD IS DRESSED WITH A DIAMOND-ORNAMENTED CROWN WITH THE MOON, WHICH IS THE RULER OF THE STARS.
(WHO IS THE EMBODIMENT OF WISDOM.)
WHO HAS A SMILING FACE
WHO HAS NO EGO)
WHOSE BREASTS ARE BIG IN SIZE
(WHO HAS A MOTHERLY NATURE TO KEEP HER CHILDREN HEALTHY.)
WHOSE TWO HANDS HOLD A VESSEL FULL OF PRECIOUS GEMS AND A RED LOTUS
(WHO IS GENEROUS AND FORGIVING)
WHOSE FORM IS GENTLE
(WHO IS BEYOND, IMMUTABLE)
WHOSE LEFT LEG IS ON A DIAMOND POT
(WHO ESCHEWS HER OWN SUPERIORITY)
MEDITATE ON THE ABSOLUTE MOTHER

This meditation is to Kundalini as the Divine Mother. It was translated from the Sanscrit by Joan Harrigan, Ph.D. with the guidance of her teacher, Swami Chandrasekharananda of Rishikish. The bold face print is the translation of words; the italics the symbolism of their meaning.

APPENDIX 2

THE KUNDALINI RESEARCH NETWORK

The Kundalini Research Network is a non-profit non-denominational network founded in March, 1990, by an international group of doctors, scientists, therapists, scholars, spiritual teachers and others interested in promoting and collaborating on research into spiritual states of human consciousness and their relationship to the Kundalini experience. KRN members are currently undertaking research and bringing, through educational programs and publications, the existence of Kundalini, and the symptoms that often occur with its arousal, to the attention of the western world. We intend to raise the level of awareness and understanding for scientific and medical communities, spiritual groups, psychotherapists, health care professionals, and people who are experiencing Kundalini awakening.

KRN provides a support system for researchers and clinicians and holds annual symposiums and regional meetings to introduce their work. It has also undertaken a long-term project to acquire a data-bank of questionnaires related to the details of the Kundalini process, as reported by hundreds who have experienced the phenomena. Dr. Yvonne Kason of Toronto, Canada, is coordinator of the questionnaire project.

The leadership is comprised of a board of directors and four executive members elected for two-year terms, who coordinate network activities on the east and west coasts of the U.S. and Canada.

For membership information contact:

Dale Pond
Kundalini Research Network
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NOC IEO

GLOSSARY

ajna chakra sixth chakra, located between the eyebrows, also called the third eye; considered the "command post" for all the chakras.

anahata chakra fourth or heart chakra; the emotional center.

ananda transcendent bliss, spiritual ecstasy.

apana breath as it is inspired, prana with a downward tendency.

asana yoga postures or poses that strengthen the body

Atman the Self

Aum (Om) mystical syllable representative of the Divine, the core tone of the universe from which all sound and creation emanate.

bandhas locks or muscular contractions of throat, solar plexus and anus sometimes included while doing the yogic mudras, asanas or pranayamas.

bhajan singing devotional songs.

bhakti love, devotion.

bij or **bija** seed, the significant sound associated with a particular energy force, often associated with the chakras.

Brahman the supreme God; when spelled brahman, may refer to a member of the Hindu priest caste.

chitrini a subtle channel within the sushumna nadi which runs from the root chakra to the crown of the head. Chitrini carries downward flowing energy and is called the source of universal sound.

cit or chit consciousness as pure intelligence.

citsakti same as jiva, the soul or the Self

citta or **chitta** mind-stuff, the substance that mediates memory and habits.

darshan seeing or being in the presence of a scared idol, place or teacher, and experiencing a blessing.

deva or **devi** demi-god or angel, god or goddess.

dharma the teaching of the Buddha; the law governing world order.

hara (Japanese term) triangle formed from the base of the sternum, down the sides of the rib cage extending downward to the naval.

ida white 'lunar" channel or nadi coiling around the sushumna, beginning at the base of the spine and ending at the left nostril.

Ista chosen and loved form of God.

Isvara the creative aspect of the Divine that governs the cosmos and individual soul.

japa mental repetition of a mantra, or the name of God.

jiva, or **jivatma** the individual as a human being; the individual and embodied consciousness or soul.

jnana wisdom, understanding. Jnana yoga is the yoga of wisdom.

kanda the muladhara psychic center.

karma action similar to cause and effect; although there is no external law-giver, individual souls through their own choice continually reap the consequences of previous actions in this and other lives.

kensho (Japanese term) refers to enlightenment, seeing fully one's own nature, an experience beyond the grasp of intellect.

kirtan chanting, singing and dancing in worship.

klesas afflictions, sufferings, negative tendencies.

kosas five subtle body sheaths or layers of decreasing density that surround the material body.

kriya the path of action; also involuntary body movement caused by the regular or increased flow of pranic energy.

kumbhaka retention of the breath.

Layayoga absorption into higher consciousness by merging individual consciousness with a Divine object of contemplation.

makyo (Japanese term) any unusual visual or physical phenomena that disturb the single-minded focus of spiritual practice.

Manipura chakra third chakra, at the solar plexus, related to the element fire.

mantra a sacred sound supposed to have power, used to focus the mind, induce reflection on the divine, provide protection in ordinary life, or for occult purposes. The energy of the mantra has a direct effect on the subtle body system.

maya the process by which the true condition of the world is veiled through differentiation and limitation of phenomena.

mudra yogic gesture made with the hands symbolizing universal principles.

muladhara chakra first chakra, located at the base of the spine, identified with security issues, and the location where Kundalini energy is coiled.

pingala the "solar " subtle channel within the sushumna, winding from the base of the spine and ending at the right nostril.

prana the vital energy of the inner or subtle body, the life-force or shakti.

pranayama yogic breathing practices that play a vital part in meditation and expand or redistribute pranic energy through the breath.

pratyahara practices of withdrawing mind from the senses, turning the attention inward.

Purusha the primary Cosmic Spirit, the counterpart of the female principle, the Being beyond the universal or cosmic person; also used as the soul or pure consciousness.

sadhaka a spiritual aspirant, seeker, one who is disciplined.

sadhana spiritual disciplines and daily practices.

Sahasrara chakra seventh chakra, above the crown of the head, symbolized by the thousand-petalled lotus. The place where Kundalini unites with Siva and pure consciousness may be experienced.

Sakti or **Shakti** the dynamic and creative aspect of the Ultimate Principle, the power that permeates all creation, the feminine counterpart of Siva.

shaktipat the process of initiation by a guru through a transmission of energy that awakens energy in the initiate.

Siddas great master of yogic powers.

siddhis psychic attainment or powers.

Siva or **Shiva** pure consciousness; the transcendent divine principle.

sushumna the central subtle channel through which Kundalini rises in the human body, located inside the spinal column.

svadhisthana chakra the second chakra, located below the navel and just above the genitals, governing sexuality.

tandra a conscious but dream-like state where one may experience visions.

third eye the point in the middle of the forehead, between the eyebrows, where cosmic consciousness opens; the Ajna chakra.

vaibhuri a spontaneous flow of higher wisdom.

vajra nadi an upward flowing nadi in the sushumna that regulates electrical energy flow.

vayu air or wind.

visuddha or **vishuddha** fifth chakra, located at the throat, associated with expression and creativity.

yantra a form or symbolic design, similar to a mandala, usually containing magic symbols useful in healing and for other metaphysical purposes, or for meditative contemplation.

Yuga a cyclic age of history. Four yugas comprise a maha-yoga (12,000 divine years): the Kali, Dwapapra, Treta and Satya, corresponding to the Greek ideas of Iron, Bronze, silver and Golden. Some say we are in the Kali Yuga, the dark age, or age of materialism. Yogananda said the Kali Yoga ended about 1700 A.D. and we are now in a 2400 year cycle of electrical and atomic energy development. (Yogananda, (1945) Autobiography of a Yogi, p. 192.)

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ENERGIES OF TRANSFORMATION

Bonnie Greenwell

This book is about the subtle energy of the life force, the pure consciousness beyond mind and the ecstatic experience of spiritual awakening. It also tells of physical collapse, psychic chaos,and personality upheaval, those elements of human transformation that uproot individuals to the core. It tells the stories of people, both ancient and modern, who have discovered and integrated an experience that pushes the edges of their sanity and their divinity. And it is a guide for survival and transformation.

It appears that when people pray, meditate, or turn inward with great intensity to find "God", what they may ultimately experience is the sat-chit-ananda of the ancient Indian scriptures. *Sat* is existence or beingness, the substance or essence that is all things. *Chit* is cosmic intelligence or knowledge that fills everything, a consciousness without personal identity. *Ananda* is ecstatic bliss. Indian pandits identify these three qualities as the essential nature of existence. Direct intuition of them becomes possible following the eruption of Kundalini energy, which is latent in each of us. This book is to help you recognize and support a unique, universal and ageless process related to spiritual experience and psychological wholeness and identified in ancient times as Kundalini awakening.

BONNIE GREENWELL, Ph.D., has been a spiritual practitioner for over thirty years. She is a licensed MFCC and a transpersonal psychotherapist and educator. She is a founder and member of the executive board of the Kundalini Research Network, and has lectured extensively to groups as diverse as the Australian Transpersonal Conference and the Jung Institute in Switzerland. She is certified to teach Ashtanga Yoga and advanced Yoga Philosophy and Therapy. She is also a patron of the World Society for Clinical Yoga.

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